

**Lutheran Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Representatives Network
Annual EIR Staff Report
May 2020**

Current Priorities in our Work

Staffing Transitions & Team Building

Kathryn Johnson’s retirement after exemplary service as director for EIR presented an opportunity to develop a new position: director of theological diversity and ecumenical & inter-religious engagement. The Rev. Carmelo Santos, PhD joined the team in January 2020. The portfolio includes responsibilities for “helping to envision and implement new patterns, methods and directions in a fast-changing religious environment. While deepening existing relationships with ecumenical and inter-religious partners, this person will also work collaboratively with other members of the team to forge relationships and structures which respond to the pressing needs. This shall include strengthening and diversifying the theological resources of this church’s witness for justice; working in a web of alliances with newly-emerging networks of ecumenical and inter-religious partners; and in lifting up, calling forth and nurturing the diverse voices which together constitute the theological richness of this church.” There are some remaining questions about how certain pieces of the work will be covered moving forward, but we will tend to them as we live into this new web of intersecting portfolios, and build a stronger spirit of collaboration and cooperation across our team. Carmelo brings significant gifts, expertise, and experience to this role, including his previous service as the director for the ELCA’s Theological Roundtable, which he will resume as part of this new portfolio. Carmelo earned his PhD in religion and science from LSTC. His areas of expertise include theological anthropology, pneumatology, Latinx & 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 June, just prior to the Churchwide Assembly, we welcomed Kristen Opalinski to serve as the Manager for Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Relations, another new portfolio on our team. Kristen’s major responsibilities including staffing of various ecumenical bodies and work 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 this role, having served previously in communications for the ELCA, and in a joint communications position of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa and the ELCA, based in South Africa, after serving there as a Young Adult in Global Mission. Kristen received her Master of Arts in Religion from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, with specializations in public leadership and conflict transformation.

All colleagues in our team – which includes Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Relations, Theological Discernment, and Racial Justice Ministries – have committed to a goal of team building in 2020.

EIR News & Perspectives Blog

We have launched a new blog, “[Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspectives](#).” You can share your feedback with us, or nominate contributors, by emailing us at EIRinfo@elca.org We have also updated the format for EIR News; please [subscribe](#) and invite others to do so.

ELCA Churchwide Assembly

The full report of ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations to the Churchwide Assembly can be accessed [here](#), under “Reports of the Churchwide Organization.” We were honored to host nearly fifty ecumenical and inter-religious guests, representing the breadth and depth of our local, national, and global relations. In the presence of these partners, the voting members of the Assembly adopted without amendment “[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran church in America](#),” by a vote of 97.48%. As the assembly rose to its feet in affirmation, our partners responded by joining hands across the stage.



A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment

“A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in August 2019, is available in [English and Spanish](#).



Work related to its interpretation and implementation is well underway. A joint meeting of the Presiding Bishop’s Consultative Panels on Lutheran-Jewish and Lutheran-Muslim Relations took place February 21. Bishop Patricia Lull, chair of the former inter-religious task force, joined the conversation via Zoom, as did Jennifer Baker-Trinity, joint staff of Augsburg Fortress and ELCA Worship. With regard to the implementation of the policy statement, the panels recommended to prioritize the development of pastoral guidelines for ministry in a multi-religious world.

They also recommended to appoint an ad-hoc committee for this task, while maintaining the two panels to carry forward their specific work and relations with Jews and Muslims.

As part of our implementation work, Kathryn Lohre, Carmelo Santos, and Kristen Opalinski joined with students and chaplains who are part of the Lutheran Student Movement in offering an [online primer](#) on ELCA inter-religious relations in April 2020. Participants were invited to share their own inter-religious experiences and reflections, and received an orientation to “[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#).”

A Declaration to the Muslim Community

The next major inter-religious priority will be the development of “A Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community” by the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations. The panel has assessed that the work is both necessary and urgent, though very different from “[A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community](#).” The work will proceed so that the declaration will come to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council no later than spring 2021. Once adopted, it will then be shared with the Lutheran World Federation via its Council, as a contribution from the US context.

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

We continue to work through the interfaith [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#) to address anti-Muslim violence and discrimination. In the early months of 2020, the campaign responded to the expansion of the [travel ban](#), including to countries with strong and fast-growing Lutheran churches. Kathryn Lohre (as campaign co-chair) and Rabbi Burton Visotzky co-authored an op-ed published by Sojourners on the “[Faith Imperative of the NO BAN ACT](#).” Internally, ELCA EIR partnered with [ELCA Advocacy](#) in support of the NO BAN ACT.



In light of COVID-19, Shoulder to Shoulder shifted its annual Ramadan Road Trip to a virtual initiative: [Welcome to My Table](#). This initiative will connect households to households online to share an iftar meal across the United States; please consider participating. As the website notes: “We strongly believe that physical distancing should not mean social isolation. It takes extra intention, effort, and creativity to connect with one another in these times, but connection remains so important for our own wellbeing and the wellbeing of our communities.” Kristen Opalinski has been working with campaign staff on the engagement of youth and young adults in this and other programs.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will resume a bilateral dialogue that was launched in 2004. The inaugural round focused on “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. Affirmed by the ELCA Conference of Bishops in March 2020, the goal of this resumed dialogue is to define a new ecumenical relationship for common mission and ministry through mutual study of each other’s understanding of the mission and responsibility of the church. The churches will undertake a joint exploration of current collaborations and areas where deeper relations are desired to inform the process. A meeting of heads of communion and senior ecumenical leadership from both churches is currently being planned for fall 2020.

The Freedom of a Christian

The Presiding Bishop launched an initiative inviting the people of the ELCA to study and reflect on Martin Luther’s “The Freedom of a Christian” in 2020, its 500th anniversary year. 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 study guide developed by Carmelo Santos will be available in late May 2020. Case studies exploring dimensions of Christian freedom, such as Paul Rajeshkar’s reflection on “What does it mean to be freed in Christ in a religiously pluralistic context?”, will also be published. Learn more by visiting [ELCA500.org](#), where you can download a copy of “[The Annotated Luther Study Edition, The Freedom of a Christian, 1520](#)”, translated by Timothy J. Wengert, generously provided by [1517 Media and Fortress Press](#).

Historical Black Church Relations & White Supremacy Work

The Presiding Bishop, Judith Roberts, director for racial justice ministries, and Rev. Albert Starr, director for multi-cultural and ethnic-specific ministries attended the 2019 Conference of National Black Churches in Atlanta, joined the first day by Bp. Strickland of the Southeastern Synod. Bishop Eaton was invited to formally offer “A 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.

Following up on the actions of the Churchwide Assembly, the Presiding Bishop convened an ELCA consultation via videoconference regarding the “Resolution Establishing June 17th as Emanuel 9 Commemoration and Day of Repentance.” The consultation included representation from churchwide staff, authors of the resolution, the African Descent Lutheran Association, the Conference of International Black Lutherans, and the European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice. The purpose of this consultation was to review and coordinate efforts in the churchwide organization and other grass-roots work related to worship resource development as called for in the resolution. The worship resources will be available online by late May. The resolution also calls for deepening conversations with the [African Methodist Episcopal Church](#) on matters of racism and white supremacy, and building upon the long-standing relations between our two churches. This work is continuing through the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and is simultaneously encouraged in local and synod settings. To support this work, two resources are recommended: 1) the congregational resource, “[Understanding One Another](#),” which was

co-published by our churches in 1996, and 2) the documentary film [Emanuel](#). Bishop Eaton has been invited to attend the AME General Conference in July; this will depend on COVID-19, of course.

The Office of the Presiding Bishop is also engaged in church-to-church conversations with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church about next steps in our bilateral relations, based on our joint [Statement of Mission](#). Similarly, bilateral work is encouraged in local and synod settings.

In light of the CWA resolution condemning white supremacy and racist rhetoric, and the National Council of Churches' initiative "Act Now to End Racism," the Presiding Bishop convened her counterparts of the predominately white churches of the NCC to 1) learn what other churches are doing to address white supremacy in church and society and 2) to explore possibilities for ecumenical cooperation. A working group with representatives from the churches was formed with an initial task of developing a shared definition of white supremacy. The definition, which will help to guide our internal ELCA work, was also adopted by the NCC Governing Board in April 2020. Please consider how this definition might be useful for work in your local settings and synods:

Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. This system deliberately subjugated people of color and Indigenous people for the purpose of material, political, and social advantage. White supremacy creates, sustains and protects a culture that structurally and ideologically privileges whiteness in virtually all facets of society. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. It is counter to the Gospel, anathema to core tenants of all major religions and people of good will. Racism is a sin that we must confess and seek to dismantle in our own lives and institutions.

(Language adapted from the following sources: the Presbyterian Mission Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries & The Episcopal Church Resources internal document)

Virtual Engagement During COVID-19

We have been involved in the planning, leadership, and participation of several virtual ecumenical and inter-religious initiatives in this time of COVID-19:

- The [National Council of Churches](#), [Christian Churches Together in the USA](#), and [Churches United in Christ](#) collaborated in an unprecedented common Easter [statement](#) and witness.
- 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.
- ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton invited President Rabbi Rick Jacobs of the [Union for Reform Judaism](#), and President Dr. Sayyid Syeed of the [Islamic Society of North America](#) 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.
- The World Council of Churches' [Thursdays in Black Ambassadors](#) issued a [statement](#) and [video message](#) addressing the "dual pandemics of COVID-19 and sexual and gender-based violence."
- 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.

Other Updates on our Work from April 2019-April 2020

Full Communion Partnerships

In September 2019, the **Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee** met at Trinity Moravian Church in New Carrollton, Md., where co-chair the Rev. Tammie Rinker served as pastor. Reflecting on its three-year program of meeting with local pastors working together in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Wisconsin, the committee discussed ways to continue to encourage this distinctively localized relationship to thrive in the contexts where these communities live together. The committee was to have met the last weekend of March 2020 in Allentown in conjunction with a broader ecumenical event on immigration titled, “Embracing the Full Household of God,” hosted by First Presbyterian Church in Allentown and sponsored in partnership between the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA, the Moravian Church, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and The Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem. The intention was for participants to learn how to support, advocate for, and build relationships alongside immigrants in their communities. The coordinating committee instead met virtually to consider next steps.

The **Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee** met at the Lutheran Center in Chicago in October 2019. It reviewed ongoing collaborations, particularly in advocacy, and discussed implications of actions from the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, especially the ordination of deacons. Looking forward, the members planned to gather information for resources needed to support shared ministries, particularly congregations. They designated teams to prepare a rite suitable for common services to renew vows of ordination, which are typically held during Lent, and to commend as well as describe the “orderly exchange” of priests and pastors provided by full communion.

Planning is underway for a **joint ELCA-TEC** revival in New York and livestreamed, led by the two churches’ presiding bishops, and with support from the local synod and diocesan bishops. There will be opportunities for satellite sites, and a digital toolkit (including an advance training on evangelism) will be available online. More information will be provided as it is available, including a confirmed date.

The meeting of the **Lutheran-United Methodist Coordinating Committee/Joint Commission**, held at Mohican Lodge in Perrysville, Ohio in late October 2019, was an ecumenical formation retreat involving local Ohio leaders identified by each of the bishops on the committee. Goals were for all participants to experience and learn more about the other tradition, while also seeing their own heritage anew in relation to the other, and then to brainstorm creatively about what United Methodists and Lutherans could do together in faithful witness and mission in the various contexts of Ohio communities. The committee’s next task will be to produce an adaptable resource, including both text and video from this event, that can be modified to different formats, leadership and participation, likely available in 2021.

In early January 2020, the Presiding Bishop issued a [pastoral letter](#) regarding our continued accompaniment and full communion partnership with the United Methodist Church following the announcement of a proposed agreement. The agreement, which details a possible separation, was developed by an ideologically diverse and self-appointed group of people. It will need to be brought through one or more annual conferences (where it will likely be amended) before it can come to the General Conference, now postponed to 2021. If the proposal is adopted by the General Conference, the result will be the separation of the denomination, with the traditionalists departing the UMC. The next coordinating committee/joint commission meeting will take place virtually in May 2020. Following the actions of the 2021 UMC General Conference, the committee will provide support in interpreting the outcomes, including any possible impact on our full communion relationship.

Lutherans and Episcopalians/Anglicans in the United States and Canada

The “four-way” relations among the ELCA, 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 Agreement 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. Through its constitutional changes at the Churchwide Assembly in August 2019, the ELCA already embraces the Anglican Church of Canada as included in the provisions for “availability of ministers of Word and Sacrament under relationships of full communion” (8.19.02). Because, however, the memorandum is itself a pioneering text, and potentially a model for other international agreements, the ELCA Church Council acted in November 2019 to adopt the MMR; to acknowledge with gratitude the affirmation of the MMR by the two churches in Canada; and to “recognize 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 come into full effect.

The four heads of communion are developing their annual devotions. The theme for 2020 will be the [Season of Creation](#) in September. The devotions will be distributed online in late June 2020.

Lutheran-Catholic Relations

The current round of US 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.

Major Lutheran-Catholic events in 2019, including a consultation at Notre Dame, lifted up the 20th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). A [statement](#), co-signed also by the leaders of five other Christian World Communions, was a significant milestone and forward-looking public witness. A [new edition of the text](#), augmented with later statements, is available, as is a common liturgy of celebration.

Pope Francis has invited people around the world to join as one during Laudato Si’ Week, May 16-14, 2020. The theme of the week is “Everything is Connected.” Online trainings will be offered for reflection and discernment May 16-23, while May 24 has been set aside for a worldwide day of prayer. As Roman Catholics and ecumenical partners prepare for the upcoming Season of Creation in September, this invitation encourages all to take part in transformational change. You can learn more and download resources via the [Laudato Si’ 2020 website](#). The [Laudato Si’ encyclical letter](#) published in 2015 by Pope Francis was a global call to climate action and care for God’s creation.

Christian Churches Together Convocation

In the context of the quadricentennial year of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the annual convocation of Christian Churches Together in the USA took place in Montgomery, Alabama in October 2019. The meeting format was adjusted to center on pilgrimages to the [Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration](#) and the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#). Curated by the [Equal Justice Initiative](#), these sacred spaces are “dedicated to the legacy of enslaved black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence.”

A film screening of “[Emanuel](#)” and discussion with the producer and Ms. Rose Simmons, daughter of the martyred Rev. Dr. Daniel Simmons, Sr., presented an opportunity for the ELCA to make a public statement about our church’s complicity, our commitment to continued relations seeking healing and justice, and the recent actions of our Church Council and Churchwide Assembly. This led, a few weeks

later, to Ms. Rose Simmons addressing the ELCA Church Council. The Presiding Bishop and Vice President also co-hosted her for a dinner discussion attended by key staff, leadership from the ethnic associations, and Women of the ELCA. Bp. Yoos and others have been utilizing the film as a tool for local engagement and dialogue, both within the ELCA and with ecumenical partners.



National Council of Churches

In October 2019, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) gathered in Old Point Comfort, Virginia to mark the 400th anniversary of the arrival of West Africans at the site of their enslavement. At the opening service at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, the Presiding Bishop preached on Habakkuk 2:1-4. She called us into God's promise of justice and peace for all people – of God's order – which is contrary to the human institution of slavery and its vestiges of white supremacy and racism. The next day the NCC, together with the General Secretary and Moderator of the World Council of Churches, and the General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, took a pilgrimage to Old Point Comfort at the waterfront for a service of remembrance and lament.



The regular business of the NCC also took place, including meetings of the Convening Tables on education, advocacy, faith & order, and inter-religious relations. At the recommendation of the Inter-Religious Relations Convening Table, the Governing Board adopted "[Interreligious Relations with a Focus on Peace](#): A Policy Statement Supporting the NCC's interreligious priority and reaffirming the 1999 policy statement "Interfaith Relations and the Churches." At a banquet, Kathryn Lohre received the J. Irwin Miller award for excellence in ecumenical leadership.

The NCC now co-convenes five national inter-religious dialogues in which we participate: Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh.

The inaugural Christian-Sikh Dialogue, co-convened by the National Council of Churches and the Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations took place September 10-11, 2019 in Columbus, Ohio. The focus of this round was on racism, white supremacy, and the ongoing impact of 9/11 – poignant in light of the anniversary and sharing of memories. An interfaith service of remembrance was held, led by members of the local interfaith council. The significant role of the ELCA in response to Oak Creek in 2012, and subsequently calling for dialogue between our traditions, was highlighted by our Sikh partners in their presentations. At this table we are able to explore the commonalities and differences we share as monotheistic traditions.



In November 2019, the third rounds of the Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Hindu dialogues took place in California. These are co-convened by the NCC and the Guibord Center – Religion Inside Out in Los Angeles. The Christian-Buddhist dialogue focused on renunciation, repentance, salvation, reincarnation, social justice, and racism. For the second time it was hosted by the monks and nuns of His Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights. The National Hindu-Christian Dialogue explored spirituality, spiritual practice, and spiritual formation. In the context of trust, the dialogue also discussed difficult geo-political concerns and injustices, in the US and India. It was hosted by the Vedanta Society and the Sanatan Dharma Temple in Norwalk, California.

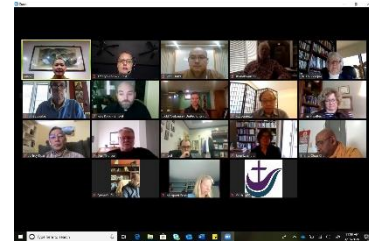
In December 2019, the Jewish-Christian dialogue on pastoral issues, co-convened by the NCC and the National Council of Synagogues, was both a dialogue and a pilgrimage to Tree of Life synagogue. Local leaders, including the rabbis of the worshipping congregations there, shared about their experiences of building interfaith bridges and addressing anti-Semitism in Pittsburgh and beyond. The 25th anniversary of “A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community” was lifted up, and the Presiding Bishop was quoted in the NCC’s [statement on anti-Semitism](#) following the dialogue.



The Christian-Muslim dialogue convened in Boston in mid-February 2020. It focused on the persecution of religious minorities and recent expansion of the travel ban. It was hosted at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. For over twenty years, the cathedral has provided space and welcome for Muslims who work downtown Boston to pray the Friday (*Jum'mah*) prayers. What began as the cathedral’s openness for Muslims to use the space in the undercroft, is today marked by generous hospitality. Through a recent renovation project, an ablution station for ritual bathing was installed. Above it is etched in stone the vision from the prophet Isaiah that for much of its history has been the motto of the cathedral: “A House of Prayer for All Peoples.” Today, hundreds of Muslims pray in the open space of the cathedral every Friday of the year, except Good Friday.



The fourth rounds of the Buddhist-Christian and Hindu-Christian dialogues had planned to meet at Claremont School of Theology in California. Instead, both dialogues met via videoconference on April 15 and 16, 2020, respectively. Those who gathered for the Buddhist-Christian dialogue discussed the realities of anti-Asian racism, in the broader surge of COVID-revealed racism. The group shared heartaches and new discoveries in what was less a typical dialogue, than a meeting of friends who have been shaped by a common history, and a building of trust. You can view a moving [video message](#) shared by our Buddhist friends, which highlights our shared struggle along with our common hope.



Similarly, COVID-19 was at the heart of the Hindu-Christian dialogue. Swami Satyamayananda, Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California called on the group to notice, "how interconnected our consciousness is." Rini Ghosh of the Vedanta Society shared stories of the Hindu youth who are providing leadership in the transitions to technology. Amidst so much suffering and death, and shared human challenges, those who gathered found hope in each other –that we might find a better way to be at peace in ourselves, with one another, and with the earth.

The Jewish-Christian dialogue scheduled to meet in late April 2020 in Washington, DC was to include a visit the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#). This round of dialogue has been postponed.

In April 2020, the NCC together with its Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh dialogue co-conveners issued the joint statement, “[One in Spirit, One in Mind, One in Heart.](#)” The statement includes a collection of scriptures and prayers from each tradition, acknowledging that “as dialogue partners whose relationships transcend physical distancing necessary to lessen the devastation wrought by this disease, we offer these scriptures and prayers from each of our traditions, for one another, and for the world.” These scriptures and prayers from inter-religious partners complement the [daily prayers, meditations, and scriptures](#) that the NCC is posting from various Christian ecumenical partners.

The National Council of Churches’ Faith & Order Convening Table developed a [special issue](#) of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies on the topic of “Racialized Violence and the Churches’ Responsibility.”

The issue has been made available for free download during this time of COVID-19. Among the papers submitted is one by Lutheran theologian James R. Thomas entitled, “The Intersection of Palestine with Ferguson, Missouri.” In the introduction to the issue Adam Ployd writes, “In light of the proliferation of extrajudicial killings of people of color in the United States—Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, and too many more to name—the majority of these essays address racialized violence against Black people in the U.S. Similarly, these essays are also often directed toward the ‘white church,’ broadly defined, and its need to engage these issues more critically, both theologically and practically. As we reflected on these tragedies, however, another crisis began to form—or, rather, to enter a new stage—on America’s southern border as Latinx families continue to be separated, with frightened children held in makeshift internment camps. Therefore, a few essays also address the racialized violence associated with the U.S. immigration system.”

Muhlenberg College “Passing the Word” Conference

In October, Muhlenberg College hosted a conference called “Passing the Word” to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the “[A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community](#).” Presentations were shared on liturgy and theology. Darrell Jodock and Kathryn Lohre co-presented on how the history of Lutheran-Jewish relations has been foundational for our expanding inter-religious relations. Participants included faculty and staff of Muhlenberg College and the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding, as well as leaders of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations. A Lutheran and Jewish student shared their moving reflections on the significance of the 1994 Declaration for us today.

World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches convened the first-ever meeting of inter-religious officers in October in Cardiff, Wales. A significant cohort of Lutherans were present. The agenda focused on sharing from the various regions and confessions. “A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment” was lifted up at several points as a model (by others!). The opportunities for networking and relationship-building were outstanding. There was strong affirmation for the continuation of the network, and for digital platforms to facilitate sharing of resources and ideas in between meetings. Since 2017, Kathryn Lohre has served on the Interreligious Reference Group of the WCC, appointed by the WCC General Secretary. This year, this small group will advise the Assembly Planning Committee on how the 50th anniversary of WCC inter-religious relations might be lifted up at various points, including in 2021 at the Assembly in Karlsruhe.

The WCC Central Committee was to have met March 18-24 in Geneva to [elect a new general secretary](#) and to undertake major planning for the [2021 Assembly](#). Due to COVID-19, the meeting was [postponed](#) until August, through those dates may also be reconsidered. The Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Saucă is serving as acting general secretary until the Central Committee can elect a new general secretary.

Alliance of Virtues

For the third year we participated in the Forum for Promoting Peace conference, held in Abu Dhabi in December, sponsored by the UAE. This conference marked the launch of The New Alliance of Virtue: <http://www.allianceofvirtues.com> (Please consider signing.) Kathryn Lohre participated as the first signer in the ceremonial signing event, and gave two sets of remarks: the first on the ELCA’s inter-religious commitments as they relate to this framework, and the second on opportunities for applying the charter in the North American context. She focused especially on building bridges between Protestant and Evangelical leaders who share commitments to addressing Islamophobia. Primarily a Christian-Muslim effort involving US Evangelicals, the Forum is an important place for ELCA and other “mainline Protestants” to be present in order to expand the narrative and seek new opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious engagement. From the point of view of our ELCA inter-religious policy statement, the Charter seems fairly basic. Yet for other contexts and traditions, its affirmation is more significant.



US Egyptian Dialogue

In early March, we participated in the US-Egyptian dialogue, a track II (non-governmental) diplomacy effort of Protestant churches from both countries, in dialogue with government, academic, and media leaders. (This is a collaboration between the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Global Mission/UN, and Advocacy staff.) The convener on Egyptian side is the Rev. Andrea Zaki, a Presbyterian who is president of the Protestant churches in Egypt, as well as the executive director of CEOSS, a Christian development organization that serves all Egyptians in social and cultural development, social justice, and inter-cultural and inter-religious harmony. The Presiding Bishop and Kathryn Lohre joined the delegation in New York for meetings at the UN and with Religions for Peace. This is a unique space for us to engage ecumenically in the complex work of international Christian-Muslim relations.



Religions for Peace USA & International

May 7 is the National Day of Prayer in the United States. [Religions for Peace USA](#) is convening a [national interfaith prayer service](#) for healing and hope online with its partners. All are welcome to join. Given the breadth of sponsoring organizations, including the ELCA, this event likely represented the broadest inter-religious convening of US-based partners in the history of the inter-religious movement. [Religions for Peace International](#) recently announced the launch of [the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund](#) to support multi-Religious collaborative efforts around COVID-19. The fund will provide 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.



LWF Consultation on Global Lutheran Identities

Nearly 70 representatives from across the global Lutheran communion gathered in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa to begin the first of a three-phase study on global Lutheran identities in October 2019.



The consultation, titled “We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities,” was hosted by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and forms the first of a multi-year theological study on how spirituality forms Lutheran identities and church engagement around the world. Representing the ELCA at the consultation were the Rev. Dr. Beverly Wallace of Luther Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Cheryl Peterson of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital

University, the Rev. Dr. Winston Persaud of Wartburg Seminary and Kristen Opalinski. This year will mark the beginning of phase two of this study with an engagement process at the member-church level. Outcomes from the three-year process will contribute to the content of the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF in 2023 in Poland.

EIR-Specific Statements of the Presiding Bishop

[Statement on Poway Synagogue Shooting](#), April 29, 2019

[4 Way Joint Message on Arusha Call to Discipleship](#), May 2019

[Pastoral Message on Racism and White Supremacy](#), September 13, 2019

[Care of Creation Statement from ELCA, TEC, & Church of Sweden](#), September 2019

[Statement on Anti-Semitic Incidents in New York](#), December 30, 2019

[Pastoral Message on the United Methodist Church](#), January 9, 2020

[Statement on Expanded Travel Ban](#), February 5, 2020

[Letter of Solidarity with Jewish Partner and the Asian American Community](#), April 21, 2020