

“Traditions United by a Spiritual Dynamic of Reform For the Sake of Christian Life, for the Sake of the World”

ELCA-UMC Coordinating Committee/Joint Commission/
September 21-23, 2017
Lutheran Center, Chicago, Illinois

On September 21-23, 2017, the group charged with nurturing the full communion relationship between the United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA) met together at the Lutheran Center in Chicago. Designated a Joint Commission by the UMC and a Coordinating Committee by the ELCA, this body was mandated by the full communion agreement, “Confessing our Faith Together.”

This meeting welcomed a new UMC co-chair, Rev. Dr. L. Edward Phillips, joined by Bishop B. Michael Watson and Rev. Dr. Kyle R. Tau. On the ELCA side were the Rev. Dr. Jonathan W. Linman, co-chair, Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin, Dr. Jacqueline Bussie, Dr. Norma J. Hirsch, and Dr. Kathryn Johnson. UMC Bishop Tracy Smith Malone was unable to attend this time but will be a member going forward. Kathryn Lohre also sent her warm regards and her regrets to the group.



In recognition of the 500th Reformation anniversary, each day included time that had a retreat character. Using the resource Jonathan prepared for the ELCA Metro New York Synod, “Rediscovering the Small Catechism,” and drawing on times of “testimony” and Luther’s seldom-sung catechism hymns, these sessions found their heart in celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It was agreed that this spiritual focus contributed to the work of the meeting, and ways will be sought to continue

such a focus in the future.

Reflecting on these times of prayer, common emphases in our traditions were identified: both Lutherans and United Methodists arose as reform movements, and both have maintained a spiritual reforming dynamic for sake of Christian life for the sake of the world. Both traditions honor what is to be known “by heart”: the commandments, creed, and Lord’s Prayer. Both emphasize the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion; worship gives prominence also to what might be called other “means of grace,” including both preaching and singing. In this individualist cultural moment, both traditions confess that Christian discipleship is lived in community and that our church bodies are not the whole church: ecumenical and, in distinct ways, inter-religious engagement are integral to discipleship.

The UMC had requested an ELCA response to the text in progress from its Commission on Faith and Order, “Wonder, Love and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church.” This text is intended to be a teaching document on the Church, to take its place beside “By Water and the Spirit” and “This Holy Mystery.” Discussion in this committee was chosen as the means for this response, which will be conveyed to the UMC.

The group also examined the current sixth draft of a Proposal for Full Communion between the UMC and The Episcopal Church, “A Gift to the World: Co-Laborers for the Healing of Brokenness.” Since the ELCA is already in full communion with both these prospective partners, it was agreed to recommend an ELCA presence at this dialogue commission.

There was review of past work of this coordinating committee, with special attention to both gifts and challenges in reception from “Building A Relationship: Best Practices.” Looking forward, building relationships among bishops was identified as a crucial focus —especially as the UMC may be moving into closer relation with TEC bishops, who often already have strong relations with their ELCA counterparts.

There was discussion of the roles theological faculties can play in this our relationship. Pilots were imagined for times of formative retreats, with Candler as an ideal first site, possibly in partnership with the North Georgia Conference. Trinity Lutheran Seminary/MTHESCO is another possible location.

It was noted also that this is a group with energy for resources for formation and education. There is need for attractive and accessible resources to help those preparing to lead a community in the partner church – what to expect in terms of e.g. liturgy and worship, or polity.

It will be important to find ways to convey the ELCA’s prayerful support for its full communion partner as it seeks its way forward with the approach of 2019’s special General Conference. Bishop Beaudoin will raise the need for prayer and accompaniment in the Conference of Bishops meeting in October. ELCA experience suggests that much energy in the UMC will be devoted to this process in the coming years. Perhaps someone from this commission could attend this special General Conference.

The next meeting is planned for July 12-14, 2018, mid-day to mid-day, tentatively in Atlanta.

The UMC will the lead in hosting. Celebration of the Eucharist is a must.

The two-night format of this meeting will be repeated in 2018, and meeting length will be re-evaluated again then.