

## **2021 REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE ECUMENICAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

The Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee supports the bishop, congregations, clergy and members of the synod in working toward the goals of the unity among Christians and mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and people of other religions.

The **2020 Virginia LARCUM (Lutheran/Anglican/Roman Catholic/United Methodist) Conference**, held in December 2020 virtually via zoom, included more than 100 rostered leaders and laity from around the country. Speakers and participants reflected on the unity and mission of the church amidst the challenges and stresses of this past year through the lens of Martin Luther's own experience. The main speaker was Dr. Phillip Cary, professor of philosophy at Eastern University, internationally acclaimed expert on Augustine, and author of *Good News for Anxious Christians* and *The Meaning of Protestant Theology: Luther, Augustine, and the Gospel That Gives Us Christ*. One participant, Pastor Eric Moehring, commented on the conference for *The Hub*, a Christ Lutheran Church, Fredericksburg, communication:

I was once asked why Lutherans would want to seek unity with other traditions: "Isn't concentrating on our own tradition enough?" This conference confirmed my answer: "This ecumenical journey makes me a better Lutheran." Dr. Phillip Cary, an Episcopalian, *did just that. Throughout his three sessions (Luther's Anxiety; Luther's Gospel as Catholic Sacrament; Being Formed by the Gospel) he brought a sense of the familiar (justification by grace through faith; Law and Gospel; the "Great Exchange" ...in 2 Corinthians 5:21) and offered...a fresh, and for most Lutherans a challenging, concept of justification as a process received by faith.* Dr. Cary [also spoke of being a Christian in a Post-Christian age by saying that] we no longer have control of our culture [and are] without benefit of a sympathetic and partnered society. [So] he calls upon the Church to "look for some of the skills the Jewish people always have had as a cognitive minority in a society hostile to them."

At the beginning of the conference, the Rev. Tom Prinz and the Rev. Dr. Chris Agnew provided an overview of the formation of LARC/LARCUM, organized over 30 years ago to help bring unity among denominations. Dr. Cary's presentations were recorded and organizers intend to post them on the LARCUM website: <https://virginalarcum.org> The next LARCUM Conference will be held on **December 3 and 4, 2021**. All rostered leaders and members of congregations are invited.

The **Virginia Lutheran Episcopal Joint Coordinating Committee** is planning a day-long event in the fall of 2021 to mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption of "**Called to Common Mission**" (CCM) with celebration, sharing of best practices and successes, and a look forward to next steps. Watch for Synod announcements as the event details are finalized.

An area **Lutheran Catholic conversation group** continued to meet throughout 2020 and dedicated much of the time together to the discussion of the document, "Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist and Ministry: A Report from the Finnish Lutheran -Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland." This document is available on the websites of the Lutheran World Federation and the ELCA ecumenical office.

Like many of the ecumenical gatherings and traditional observances this past year, the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** (January 18-26, 2021) was also held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme, "Abide In My Love . . . You Shall Bear Much Fruit" (John 15:1-17) was the focus of an ecumenical service led by Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal and Methodist bishops in the area. Here are links to the [Worship Aid](#) and the [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity video](#).

The **2022 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** will begin on Tuesday, January 18 and end on Tuesday, January 25.

The charter of the "**New Alliance of Virtue**", which aims to build global peace based on tolerance and religious freedom, was inaugurated in December 2019 and was available for study and discussion in 2020. The New Alliance of Virtue: <http://www.allianceofvirtues.com>

Congregations and Synods may also add their signatures to the charter. Kathryn Lohre (Assistant to the ELCA Presiding Bishop and Executive for Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Relations) was part of the ceremonial signing of the charter of the New Alliance of Virtue and offered remarks linking the ELCA's inter-religious commitments to the charter. Please read "[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)," which was adopted at the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. A Spanish version is also available for download: [Declaración de compromiso interreligioso: Una declaración de política de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América](#).

For more information on the ELCA's Ecumenical and Inter-Religious (EIR) commitments and activities, see the **Lutheran Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Representatives Network** (LEIRN) EIR annual staff report: [2020 Annual Staff Report to LEIRN](#)

If you are interested in serving on the Synod's **Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee**, or if you have best practices or success stories regarding your congregation's ecumenical or inter-religious relationships, please contact the Committee Chair.

Submitted by

Rev. Mark Brown, Chair