

REPORT OF OFFICE FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS 2019

This synodical unit is charged with supporting the congregations, clergy and members in fulfilling a central provision of the synodical constitution to attend to goal of the unity of all of Christ's church. It does so by supporting the chief ecumenical officer of the synod, the bishop, in the bishop's responsibilities to encourage, implement and maintain our relationships with other Christian communities and to cooperate with other communities of faith for the common good.

In the past twelve months the unit has been involved with planning the 2018 Lutheran/Anglican/Roman Catholic/United Methodist Covenant event held in Dec 2018 in Charlottesville, VA. The event began with a prayer vigil on the first evening led by the bishops of the four traditions on the square that had seen so much violence and hatred. The event presenter was Dr. Karen Westerfield-Tucker, UMC, president of the International and National Hymnological Society, who demonstrated how hymns hold the center of our traditions in our communities as well as introduce the riches of other traditions into our worship life. This fall in Virginia Beach, Fr. James Loughran, SA, editor of Ecumenical Trends, will delve into the history and importance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, observed each year in January. Our synodical unit takes an active part in the statewide planning process for these events.

Our unit is also active in planning the Joint Clergy Event, sponsored by the Lutheran Synods of Virginia and Metro DC along with the Dio. of Virginia held at Shrine Mont Episcopal Retreat Center in the Shenandoah Valley. This year the presenters on June 24-26 will be Dr. Timothy Wengert and Dr. Alyson Barnett-Cowan on the theme, From Crib to Cross. It will look to unpack the ethos of each tradition to help clergy and lay leaders to better understand their counter parts in planning joint ventures and witness with our full communion partners.

We continue to participate in the local Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC) and our local Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversation group. Recently this group has been studying the liturgy and pastoral practices of each tradition at the time of death. Both groups meet six or seven times a year. In both

cases the groups pay special attention to international and national dialogue results and the responses of our churches to these documents.

This year has been a time of real tension and pain for our dialogue partners. The Roman Catholic, Anglican/Episcopal and United Methodist communions at the international and national level have all been consumed with controversy and even scandal. Such matters have affected our local area too. We are experiencing a change in leadership in all our local partner churches and this means we must build relationships between new leaders. The Virginia Council of Churches and the Interfaith Conference of Washington continue to make a witness in our area at a time when the general society is roiled by dissension and discord. We have had a continued Lutheran presence on the Board of the Washington Theological Consortium which is a network of institutions in our area for the training of clergy and lay leaders. This remains an important challenge to help produce church leaders who are knowledgeable and have a passion for unity and cooperative opportunities for ecumenical witness.

As this synodical year draws to a close, so to does my time as chair of this synodical unit. Having served this unit since the inception of the ELCA it has been a long trajectory. There have been real ups and downs in relationships, commitments and energy for ecumenical work. They have all been weathered and I have every confidence we will see this work sustained in the future-it is after all apart of who we are and not just something we do.

I would take the time to thank the bishops and lay leadership of the synod; the synod council and financial officers, who have consistently supported the work of the office and unfailingly encouraged me and the other members of the unit in our vision and work. It has helped make our synod a recognized leader in ecumenical efforts.

Submitted by,

Rev. Thomas Prinz, chair