

REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS TABLE

YEAR 2016-2017

CHAIR: REV. THOMAS PRINZ

The purpose of this Synod Table is to assist the Synod Bishop in the Bishop's function as chief ecumenical officer of the Synod.

The task of the unit is to monitor ecumenical relationships in this country and internationally; to manage local and regional relationships and activities; to help plan programs that explain ELCA growing ecumenical relationships and encourage congregations to engage their ecumenical and interreligious partners in witness to common concerns of justice and peace, witness and study, cooperation and prayer where these activities are possible.

This means the Table participants must study significant and related ecumenical and interreligious texts and resources with our local partners whenever possible and plan feasible events for joint learning and co-operation within the limits of our funding.

The year 2017 is dominated by the international and national observances of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Most attention has been given to the documents: **From Conflict to Communion**; its **Study Guide** and **Common Prayer**, a mutually agreed upon liturgy for use in congregations and assemblies of the church. This service order was used in the historic joint Lutheran and Roman Catholic worship service in Lund, Sweden lead by Pope Francis and Bishop Younan of the Lutheran World Federation. Other important resources include the document **Declaration on the Way**, a product of the United States conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the ELCA. Augsburg Fortress has also published an invaluable **Resource** book for use by parish planners.

What began as a trickle of material has now matured into a flood of books, essays and articles drawing attention to our roots in the past history of the church, our present realities and challenges, and the future promise of a Lutheran movement that has become an ethnically diverse, worldwide pluriform presence among an even larger Christian family of traditions.

An international conference in Washington D.C., has just drawn major thinkers from around the world on the topic: **Luther and the Shaping of the Catholic Tradition**. In October the members of the Synod will have an opportunity to attend several events co-sponsored by the Metro Synod and the German Embassy including the premier of a liturgical work title, "Mass of the Holy Spirit". Several of our congregations are making use of the rich resources in scholarship

and talent in our region to offer their own observances of the Quincentenary of the Reformation.

Other activities continue apace. In 2017 the Joint VA Clergy Planning Team of Episcopalians and Lutherans is sponsoring days of reflection and prayer in four locations around the Commonwealth. On Dec 1 and 2 the VA Lutheran-Anglican-Roman Catholic-United Methodist planning group (LARCUM) is planning its annual meeting in the Richmond area with Dr. Susan Wood, principal Roman Catholic drafter, along with ELCA Kathryn Johnson, of **Declaration on the Way**. Last fall Dr. Joseph Small of the Presbyterian Church, USA made a significant contribution to understanding the contribution and challenge of the Reformation event to our current witness.

Other events include several observances of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU). At the Northern Virginia event in which our regional bishops' often take a part we welcomed Bishop Michael Burbidge to the Diocese of Arlington and Bishop Sharma Lewis to the United Methodist Conference headquartered in Richmond.

Our jurisdictional leadership continues to change as we have now expressed our gratitude to Bishops Cho (UMC), Loverde (RC) and Mauney (ELCA), who have retired. Their contributions have been vital to their own churches and to the larger ecumenical and interreligious community.

We continue to maintain relationships with the VA Council of Churches; Interfaith Conference of Washington, Washington Theological Consortium (which has welcomed two new institutional members as it prepares to work with our new United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg). Regular gatherings of the regional Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC) and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversation (L/RC) whose beginnings go back to the end of Vat. II! This results in a catalogue of over 40 face to face meetings and 24 conference calls over the last year. Members of the Table provide not only a presence but leadership in all these venues. Members of the Table have attended the National Workshop on Christian Unity (NWCU); the North American Academy of Ecumenists (NAAE); annual conference of Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, as well as a Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conference in W. VA.

In these ways the Table seeks to serve the ecumenical and interreligious participation of the Synod in accordance with our Synod Constitution which commits us to the task of unity in our place and in our time.

Submitted by,

Rev. Thomas Prinz, chair