

Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee Meets

CHICAGO (ELCA) – Members from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), joined their colleagues from The Episcopal Church for a meeting of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee in Marriottsville, Md., May 9-11. The committee is charged with encouraging and assisting efforts between the ELCA and The Episcopal Church as the two denominations live into their full communion relationship as described in “Called to Common Mission,” the 1999 document that describes this relationship.

ELCA committee members include the Rev. Donald P. Kreiss, bishop of the ELCA Southeast Michigan Synod and Lutheran co-chair of the committee; the Rev. Claire S. Burkat, bishop of the ELCA Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod; the Rev. Lowell G. Almen, former ELCA secretary; Kathryn L. Johnson, ELCA director for ecumenical and inter-religious relations; Dr. Mitze M. Budde, Virginia Theological Seminary; and the Rev. Natalie Hall, pastor in residence at First English Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh.

“The ELCA is enriched by all of its full communion relationships, and the gifts are enhanced because each of these relationships has its own distinctiveness,” said Johnson. “Thus it has been very important to have a coordinating committee for each relationship whose task is to help the partners live into the implications of being in full communion. These committees celebrate and correlate common work on all levels of the life of our churches and encourage us to go further in shared ministry and mission.”

During the meeting, the committee visited three local Lutheran-Episcopal ministries established during the last three years with the support of the ELCA Delaware-Maryland Synod and the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. These ministries include: The Churches of the Nativity and Holy Comforter, an Episcopal-Lutheran community in Baltimore; Church on the Square in Canton, Md.; and The Slate Project, sponsored by First English Lutheran Church in Baltimore.

“The meeting was another important step on the journey for both our traditions,” said Kreiss. “We affirmed for each other the significant connections that already exist between local ministries and congregations and were excited by the shared ministries we visited in the Baltimore area. Fifteen years after ‘Called to Common Mission,’ the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee is celebrating a shift in our focus – from working together to solve problems arising in this relationship to working together to advance the gospel by sharing leaders, gifts and resources.”

The committee discussed a letter from the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission, the committee’s partner in Canada. The letter encouraged the churches of the three full communion agreements to find ways to move into closer relationship. The agreements are those between Lutherans and Anglicans in the United States, Canada, and among churches of the Nordic countries and the British Isles.

Discussion also included the ongoing implementation of “Called to Common Mission,” the challenges and opportunities for joint ministries and how to support them, the creation of standard guidelines and a FAQ for churches considering joint ministries and how to make the resources more accessible.

The next committee meeting will be in Chicago, Feb. 8-10, 2017. Full communion is not a merger between denominations. It is a relationship based on common confessing of the Christian faith and mutual recognition of Baptism and sharing of the Lord’s Supper. The churches worship together and may exchange clergy.

Martin Luther.