



## **Case Studies prepared by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada as we resume a dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**

### **Background**

This case study of local and regional collaborations between the two churches is presented by Rev. Rene J. Martin, Co-Chair of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the Pacific Southwest Region (PSWR) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ; DOC or Disciples) and the Southern California Nevada Conference (SCNC) of the United Church of Christ (UCC). Rev. Martin, who is married to an ELCA Pastor, has been actively pursuing opportunities for collaboration with the ELCA congregations in his region, and his passion for ecumenical relationships has rekindled his regional church's ecumenical endeavors. In this study, Rev. Martin presents what has been done in his region and more ways to manifest unity in Christ in the region with a formalized relationship between the two denominations.

One thing that should be noted is that, as Rev. Martin's title for the regional church's committee suggests, the Disciples' PSWR has formed one ecumenical committee with UCC's SCNC. The United Church of Christ is a full communion partner with the ELCA through the Formula of Agreement and has entered into the full communion relationship with the Disciples since 1989. The UCC and the Disciples have merged their boards and offices of the mission units and formed the Global Ministries more than a couple of decades ago. The ELCA has also closely worked with the UCC in many areas. The existing relationships between the Disciples and the UCC and the ELCA and the UCC pose a question of whether the common connection with the UCC can guide a path for full communion of the Disciples and ELCA.

Another meaningful ecumenical relationship that the two churches shared was through the Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC). Until the ELCA left the CUIC in 2019, the two churches fully participated in the CUIC and have recognized each other's ministry through the theological agreements of the CUIC. It is fair to be said that the foundational theological works to fully reconcile and recognize the order of the ministry of the two churches have already been laid through the work of the CUIC.

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**Disciples Pacific Southwest Region's Adult Youth Leader  
meeting with Pacifica Synod of the ELCA and Southern California  
Nevada Conference (UCC)**

**September 2017**



This was a video conference call sharing about respective youth ministries and exploring willingness to collaborate geographically within the Disciples Region/ELCA Synod/ UCC Conference on youth ministry. This meeting was inspired after observing similarity in youth programs between the Pacific Southwestern Region of the Disciples of Christ and the Pacifica Synod of the ELCA. The result of this conference was 2 Disciples youth being invited to participate in ELCA Youth Leadership Conference (Pacifica and Southwest Synods) in North Los Angeles county ELCA camp (El Camino Pines) the following November. Key observations from this event are:

- During Synod Specific breakouts, Disciples Youth held their own meeting
- The youth had connected well in the plenary settings, at meals, in worship, and during outdoor activities.
- Unfortunately, there had not been a follow-up. Factors that contributed include resistance to invite another denomination into youth activities.
- Parent from the northern part of the region commented that the ELCA camp was more accessible for churches in the north part of the region (Bakersfield, Santa Barbara, Lompoc, San Luis Obispo)

## Pacific Southwest Region Dialogue with Pacifica Synod

July 2019

PSWR initiated dialogue with Pacific Synod for the purpose of exploring opportunities for mutual ministry and collaboration in Southern California given overlap of geography in Southern California and Hawaii. Bishop Andy Taylor visited the PSWR Disciple Ministry Center in the Fullerton and had lunch with Co-Regional Minister Don Dewey and Associate Regional Minister B.J. Barlow. Items discussed during this meeting include:

### Areas where PSWR and Pacifica overlap

Geography- San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, San Diego, Imperial Counties and Hawaii.

The Northern part of the PSWR overlaps with the ELCA Southwest Synod.

Southern Nevada is part of the Grand Canyon Synod shared with Arizona.

### Invitations

ELCA Synod Leadership brought greetings during PSWR Regional Gathering in October 2015

Pastor Lara Martin presented on Lutheran Theology and ELCA during PSWR regional Assembly in October 2016

### Common Curriculum

#### The LGBTQ+

Disciples Open and Affirming and ELCA's Reconciling in Christ

#### Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism (PSWR) and Equity and Diversity (Pacifica Synod)

PSWR and PS both voted in the same year (2018) to require/highly recommend Anti-Racism training every five years similar to boundary training. There is an opportunity to partner and collaborate on training. Joseph Brandt is a common source in the curriculum.

### Camp Ministries

DOC Loch Leven and ELCA Luther Glen are within 10 miles from each other in San Bernardino Mountains

ELCA El Camino Pines in Frazier Park

DOC De Luz Camp in San Diego County (accessible for Latino Families)

### Schools

Cal Lutheran in Thousand Oaks

Chapman University in Orange



## **Pacific Beach Christian Church (Rev. Brian Daly) and Christian Lutheran Church (Rev. David Nagler) in San Diego**

### **Current**

Pacific Beach is a neighborhood in the city of San Diego. Pastors Brian and Dave are colleagues and interact often in the community. Ways these pastors interact include:

- Their respective Churches in Pacific Beach launching a shared youth ministry in January 2020. This ministry was put on pause due to COVID19
- Sharing an enduring partnership in caring for a refugee family from Eritrea for over a year. Raised money to provide housing and board for mother and her five children
- Both congregations participate in Community Interfaith functions and meetings

## **Pacific Southwest Region sent Disciples church members to Pacifica Synod pilgrimage to Israel-Palestine for Latino youth.**

June 2019

This opportunity came about when Rev. Rene Martin (DOC) participating in Pacifica Synod Clergy Retreat in the previous November as a spouse to Rev. Lara Martin (ELCA). Rev. Nate Allen (currently pastor of St. Paul Lutheran church in Fullerton) advertised a “pilgrimage to Israel-Palestine for Latino Youth.” The intent of the pilgrimage was to bring Latino youth to Israel-Palestine in order to make comparisons to current US policies concerning immigration detention and systemic oppression. Rene saw this as an opportunity for ecumenical engagement and notified Rev. Gabe Lopez, Pastor of East Whittier Christian Church who is co-pastor of a 2nd generation Hispanic ministry. Pastor Gabe replied with two members of his Congregation who agreed to go in the pilgrimage. Pastor Nate arrange for a grant from the Pacifica Synod that was utilized to pay the required deposits for all the pilgrims. Pastors Gabe and Rene went about requesting support from ministries within the PSWR and General Church. Rene also went about requesting funds from the Pacific Network for Mission Education (PNME). PNME responded with a grant providing the Disciples pilgrims an excess that was able to be shared with the Lutheran Pilgrims. There were cultural challenges between the Disciples and Lutherans that were eventually worked out. There was an intentional after-action meeting with Rev. Rene (did not attend pilgrimage) and Rev. Nate (led pilgrimage) sharing feedback from pilgrims and lessons learned. The after-action meeting was mediated by retired UCC pastor Marcia Hoffman who has intensive experience with Israel Palestine pilgrimages.

## **Good Shepherd Lutheran Church partner with *UrbanMission* in restorative justice**

### **Current**

- *UrbanMission* Minister Rev. Nora Jacob has provided training on restorative justice to members of the GSLC Social Justice Task Force
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church has intentionally provided food for *UrbanMission* Food Pantry during COVID response



## Reflections by Rev. Rene Martin

As the defacto minister for ecumenical relations in the region for the PSWR, married to an ELCA pastor, who has been intentional about developing “buy-in,” here are my lessons learned.

Local ELCA pastors will not extend ministry “privileges” to Disciples pastors because there isn’t an authorized partnership in place (Full Communion partnership or other authorization from synod or Church-wide). I have heard of rare situations where synod Bishops have authorized Disciples pastor in temporary situations when there wasn’t a Lutheran pastor to provide care for a congregation. I have not experienced Disciples pastors having a similar issue extending privileges to other ordained ministers of the gospel.

ELCA and Disciples pastor tend to flock together in local interfaith and ecumenical ministries. Both denominations have similar values in progressive Christian theology (LGBTQ affirmation, Anti-racism, Caring for refugees, female ordination)

Synod Bishops and Regional Ministers are in a unique position to identify mutual ministry opportunities and resource sharing that will speaks directly to the call of being stewards of the church resource in the denominational and universal sense. True partnership needs to happen in the initial planning phase of a project and not two weeks before the event. Neither denomination wants to be in a position where they feel they are in a “retail/consumer” position.

### **Opportunities in the PSWR/Pacifica and Southwest Synods that can happen tomorrow**

- Open and Affirming/Reconciling Christ training and fellowship: Currently using same curriculum
- Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism and Diversity and Equity Training: Currently in the formation stages. Both Denominations are using the similar materials, pedagogy, and sources
- Boundary Training: This is universal and is commonly adapts from extra-church resources

### **Opportunities in the PSWR/Pacifica and Southwest Synods that can happen in the coming year**

- Camp Ministries: There are 4 camp ministries between the two denominations in the Southern California. The Disciples camp are administered directly by the PSWR, the ELCA camps are administered by a separate organization Lutheran Retreats Camps and Conferences (LRCC). Especially in the current economic downturn associated with COVID, there is an opportunity to unit in two ways
- Unified Administration: LRCC manages two camps 160 miles (4 hours drive time) apart. Loch Leven is 10 miles from Luther Glen and Camp Deluz in North San Diego County is 80 miles away (2 hours drive time) from Luther Glen. LRCC has potential resources to expand to provide camp and conference services to all for locations.
- Sub-geographic Camps (North Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego): Current geography and Traffic patterns make it prohibitive for families in both denominations to have regular participation in Camps in their denomination. Pacifica Synod and PSWR partnered on Camps in the San Diego and San Bernardino County and Southwest Synod and PSWR partnered in Camps in North Los Angeles County, there would be an opportunity to get greater participation all locations.

### **Opportunities that can happen in (1-2 years)**

- Coastal Youth Gathering for Progressive Christian Youth
- Both Denomination were planning multi-regional/Synod Youth Gatherings prior to COVID
- Christian Fellowship Gathering
- Both Denomination have Men, Women Fellowship as well as Ethnic ministries.



**Opportunities that can be synchronized**

- Synod and Regional Assemblies: Currently as churches have grown smaller, Regions and Synods have opted to have Assemblies at large church campuses rather than convention centers due to prohibitive cost. Synod and Regions may want to explore what it would be like to have a collocated assembly where there can be shared resources space for booths and refreshment and semi-private meeting spaces for Denominational Business.

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