



Pre-Dialogue Report

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

On Monday, September 28, 2020, leadership from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (CC(DOC)) gathered for a preliminary meeting about resuming bilateral dialogue between the churches. The meeting took place at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, with two participants joining via zoom.

Participants included:

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA

- Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop
- Rev. Don Kress, Bishop, Southeast Michigan Synod, Chair, Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Relations Committee, ELCA Conference of Bishops (via zoom)
- Ms. Kathryn Lohre, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop, Executive, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

- Rev. Terresa Hord Owens, General Minister and President
- Rev. Dr. Mark Toulouse, Emeritus Professor of American Religious History, Brite Divinity School (via zoom)
- Rev. Paul S. Tch , President, Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry

The purpose of the preliminary meeting was two-fold: 1) to deepen relationships and mutual understanding and 2) to make decisions about the topic and next steps for the resumed dialogue.

The agenda included “state of the church” updates from both heads of communion. The Rev. Dr. Toulouse and Bishop Kreiss offered presentations on the “history, polity, practice, and ecumenical self-understanding” of each church. Kathryn Lohre and Paul Tch  gave an overview of the former dialogue between the churches, and introduced case studies written by mid-judicatory leaders and/or pastors from each church intended to inform our joint exploration of current collaborations and areas where deeper relations are desired to inform the process.

The discussion that followed was framed by the goal of the resumed bilateral dialogue: to define a new ecumenical relationship between the churches. The case studies helped to clarify that the challenge that needs to be addressed more fully in order to move forward is in the space between mutual recognition and mutual reconciliation of ministries. Thus, the discussion centered on theological differences, including each tradition’s relationship to the ancient historical creeds, and understanding of ministry. There was a decision to resume the dialogue in January 2021 on a virtual platform, and to pick up the original topic from the initial dialogue meeting in 2004, which was “the role, place, and power of the sacraments and the Confessions in shaping our identities as church.” Four delegates will be named from each church, including especially teaching theologians, and Paul Tch  and Kathryn Lohre will proceed with planning and staffing the dialogue.