

Overview of the former dialogue between the ELCA and the CC(DOC)

In October 2003, a pre-dialogue meeting took place, with a goal to arrive at a recommendation to launch the formal dialogue between our two churches, and to identify the key issues that should be dealt with in the dialogue. The conversation explored history, ethos, ecclesiology, and basic norms of each church.

Participants included: Randy Lee (staff), David Truemper, Kurt Hendel, and Steven Ullestad for the ELCA; Robert Welsh (staff), Richard Guentert, and Cynthia Lindner for the CC(DOC); and Lydia Veliko as a UCC observer.

The pre-dialogue report recommended that the goal of dialogue between the two churches should be full communion. It was proposed that the first theme be “*The role, place, and power of the sacraments and the Confessions in shaping our identities as church* [thus addressing the core understandings of our churches as being sacramental/covenantal (for Disciples) and confessional (for the ELCA)].”

The pre-dialogue report also recommended that the dialogue team include 4-6 persons from each church, including “persons with expertise in the areas of Bible, sacramental theology, liturgy, church history (including patristics) and governance. The pre-dialogue group, which included the UCC ecumenical officer as an observer, affirmed continuing this practice in the dialogue. The dialogue was proposed to meet twice a year, primarily in Chicago.

Randy Lee (ELCA) submitted the proposal to the presiding bishop for approval, and Robert Welsh (CC(DOC)) submitted it to the Board of the Council on Christian Unity. Both churches, through these avenues, approved moving forward with launching a dialogue. Each church then named its representatives to the dialogue team.

Representatives included: Kurt Hendel, Sarah Henrich, David Truemper, Steven Ullestad (co-chair), and Randy Lee (staff) for the ELCA; Patricia Duncan, Richard Guentert (co-chair), Cynthia Linder, Clark Williamson, and Robert Welsh (staff) for the CC(DOC); and Lyndia Veliko (staff) as the UCC observer.

In April 2004, the first meeting of the dialogue took place. The meeting focused on building relationships, and also delved into the substance of the dialogue theme. Papers were presented on “Confessions and Identity” and “Covenant and Identity,” and “Understanding the Sacraments.” Key documents from each church were shared with dialogue representatives in advance for study and reflection:

- *The Augsburg Confession* (the foundational Lutheran confessional document)
- “The Use of the Means of Grace” (a document on sacramental practices adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 1999)
- Sections of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; and
- “Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” (the policy statement adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 1991)
- *The Church for Disciples of Christ: Seeking to be Truly Church Today* (a book by Robert Welsh)
- “Christian Unity and Our Identity at Disciples of Christ” (an article by Robert Welsh)
- The “Preamble” to *The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*

The second meeting of the dialogue that was scheduled for **November 2004** was postponed to **May 2005**. It is unclear from the archives if the May 2005 meeting went forward as planned, or if any other subsequent formal dialogue meetings took place. In **July 2005** Sharon Watkins was elected to serve as General Minister and President of the CC(DOC). Staff transitions in the ELCA’s ecumenical office were also underway.