

REGIONAL OFFICE IN NORTH AMERICA

PURPOSE AND TASK

The Regional Office in North America has as its primary purpose the enhancement of Lutheran communion and visible solidarity among the LWF member churches in North America. The office is located in Chicago in the offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). LWF member churches in North America include the ELCA with a membership of 4,800,000, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) with 174,000 members, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad with 12,000 members and the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Diaspora with 1500 members. The theological understanding of Lutheran communion continues to call and challenge North Americans to live more deeply in global relationships while becoming empowered to witness in new ways within the North American society.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

Church Councils

In both the ELCA and the ELCIC, the church council serves as the governing board between assemblies. The Regional Officer sits as an advisor on both councils and reports with written and oral reports at their meetings. The officer's presence at the meetings is a visible reminder that the churches are part of a global communion. The councils both meet twice annually, normally in Winnipeg, Manitoba (ELCIC) and Chicago (ELCA).

ELCIC Synod Conventions

The Regional Officer participated in the Eastern Synod Convention in Waterloo, giving a keynote address, preaching and leading two workshops. The officer also participated in the Saskatchewan Synod Convention in Prince Albert by moderating a diversity panel, meeting with youth and preaching at the closing worship service.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry

This year both the ELCA and the ELCIC appointed liaisons to the LWF Youth Desk. The liaisons mark a new, heightened awareness of the strong links to youth and young adults through the LWF. The Regional Officer sits as an advisor to a new ELCA Strategic Alliance on Young Adults Ministry. The alliance meets quarterly, bringing together all ELCA staff who work with young adults in order to inventory, imagine and discuss ideas, concerns and programs.

Global Mission Event

1500 global mission-minded Lutherans across North America gathered in Amherst, Massachusetts for a summer mission festival including workshops, worship, speakers and fellowship. The Regional Officer led workshops for adults and children on the mission and ministry of the LWF. In addition, a display was set up to assist with interpretation and education.

Consultation on Commercial Sexual Exploitation

A consultation in November brought concerned North American Lutherans together in Winnipeg to discuss how our faith calls and equips us to respond to the issue of global commercial sexual exploitation. The consultation was hosted by the WICAS Regional Coordinator for North America and the LWF Regional Office in North America with a planning team from both the ELCIC and the ELCA. Thirty participants spent three days working under the theme, “Consider this...Take council...Speak out!”

ELCIC Youth Gathering

1,240 youth and youth leaders met in August for the ELCIC biennial youth gathering in Winnipeg. The Regional Officer participated with greetings, a display space and informal meetings with youth, youth workers and adult chaperones. In consultation with the regional office, the youth have committed to raise funds for a DMD project for youth ministries in Brazil during the next two years. There was also opportunity to meet with two representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iceland who were present at the event.

Lutheran Association of Maritime Ministries

The Regional Officer serves as an advisor to the board of this ELCA-affiliated agency. The agency works to facilitate effective Lutheran participation in holistic ministry to International Seafarers, American Merchant Marines, Commercial Fishers and their family members. On ship visits they distribute ‘WaterWords: Sea Readings For the People of the Sea’, (a bible study course for seafarers,) as well as warm hats, phone cards, transportation for medical care, worship services and pastoral care. Currently there are more than 2.5 million seafarers active on the seas, with monthly salaries averaging \$425 USD. Most seafarers are away from home nine to ten months a year. The association hopes to work with the LWF in the future in planning a consultation for those who work with global maritime ministries.

Diaspora Churches

This has been a year of unprecedented change in both the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad and the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Diaspora. Following the unexpected death of Archbishop Udo Petersoo of the Estonian Diaspora Church, an interim archbishop was appointed. An election will be held in 2007 to elect a new archbishop. In September, Bishop Hans Dumpys resigned as bishop of the Lithuanian Diaspora Church for personal reasons. An interim bishop was appointed and an election will be held in May 2007 to elect a bishop.

Middle East Strategic Planning Committee

The ELCA has an assembly-adopted mandate on peace in the Middle East. The program “Peace Not Walls” involves several ministry units within the ELCA who work on advocacy, education and fund raising for Middle East peace. The Regional Officer serves as the LWF advisor on the Strategic Planning Committee.

Endowment Fund

Support of the LWF Endowment Fund is a priority for this office. In addition to regularly emphasizing the Endowment Fund in presentations and written materials, an annual appeal letter is sent to a large ELCA mailing list and a full page advertisement which encourages giving to the Endowment Fund runs in the October issue of The Lutheran magazine in the ELCA. The magazine has a circulation of 380,000.

Resource Development

The need for interpretative and educational materials about the LWF is important in North America as the LWF is not very visible. Significant work this year included website development (www.elca.org/lwf), LWF Sunday materials specifically designed for North America, articles in the churches' magazines, interpretive materials related to world hunger funds, and bulletin inserts. These are all part of sharing the LWF story and building awareness of and commitment to the LWF. This year, strong use of the phrase "66 million Lutherans DO make a difference!" has gained recognition and increased interest in the LWF.

North America Regional Committee

The North America Regional Committee (NARC) is the advisory committee for the Regional Office. The committee includes the LWF DMD Director, two members from the ELCIC and three from the ELCA. The committee met for three days in Chicago in December and by conference calls in February and June.



The December 2006 meeting of the North America Regional Committee in Chicago

Consultation, Dialogue and Conversation

Strong partnerships exist between the regional office and the leaders of the ELCA and ELCIC. There is ongoing consultation and dialogue with the bishop and national staff of the ELCIC and with the bishop, Global Mission Unit, Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations Office, and the Worship Unit of the ELCA. A representative of each church is now active as an advisor on the other's church council.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Generating interest in, and interpreting the work of, the LWF among the member churches in North America is a major challenge and opportunity. Encouraging support of the LWF Endowment Fund is an ongoing focus.

Encouraging conversations between and among the churches on how they live out communion, both theologically and structurally, in North America is an important area of work for this office and one that requires ongoing attention.

Engaging the churches of North America on issues of globalization is not easy. Deep and honest dialog on globalization will be an ongoing effort.



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