

**Lutheran Reformed Coordinating Committee**  
March 25-26, 2008 – McCormick Theological Seminary

Lydia Veliko convened the meeting. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, President of McCormick and new member on the LRCC welcomed the group and provided information about the joint sharing of location and theological education/library between McCormick and the Lutheran School of Theology. She also gave an overview of other theological schools in the area and the opportunity for students to study in other seminaries.

The committee members provided background and introductory remarks.

Four ecumenical staff persons met to plan the agenda. The agenda included: history and look at the future.

Doug From provided the history of the Formula of Agreement. Dialogue happened since 1963 and later in the 60's with Marburg Revisited. Invitation of the 3 Reformed Churches were to be considered together. 1989 conversations began with ELCA to see if there could be a full dialogue again. Eventually the direction was found when there could be "affirmation and admonition." When the Agreement was completed, the decision needed to be made about when to vote. Vote was deferred until 1997. There needed to be approval by all four churches. 1998 completed the voting by Presbyteries and a celebration was held.

The orderly exchange of pastors was developed. A theology group meets as a sub-group of the LRCC. A detailed discussion of history, concerns, and anxieties were shared, including full communion and relationships with others, e.g. Lutheran-Episcopal; "Presence" of the Lord in Holy Communion.

A question was raised about involving others. Could other church bodies be added to the full communion agreement? The Lutheran polity would need to do it bi-laterally.

**How we have embodied our work in the LRCC: working committees**

The role of the CC was not to initiate ministry. However, there was to be a theology committee that addressed concerns, traditions. The committee was invited to be in dialogue with the CC. There needs to be some intentionality about the theology committee relating to CC because this is one of the defined tasks. Formula of Agreement Ministry (FOAMS) task force has helped with orderly exchange questions.

There is also a committee that deals with racial ethnic concerns (CARE group). They share resources and meet regularly. There has been discussion about what the role of the task forces/committees, etc. is. The CC has requested reports from these committees or task forces. How do we look at appointments, e.g. churchwide staff, other appointments?

The question about participating in the governance bodies of one another was raised. How can we find ways of accompanying one another in various concerns or issues or programs? Do we have accountability to our parent body, as a coordinating committee?

In this 10<sup>th</sup> year, we need to look at ways that we can continue to live into this our full communion agreement. The role of coordinating is functional, but decision making would need to be referred back to each church body. Monitoring what is happening in common ministry is an important role for the coordinating committee.

Robina Winbush shared that the LRCC deals with relationships. Full communion is often seen as simply the orderly exchange of ministers, but we need to look more deeply at other areas of ministry. Is there anything particular about this relationship that would be helpful to the wider ecumenical community? The NCCC had a task force to look at agreements, but the study really did not fully address these concerns (Faith and Order study committee).

Do we know who is participating where and what is their role? The CC provides an opportunity for looking at issues that surface, e.g. sexuality, divestment, what if a church leaves a communion?

Full communion helps us look at the orderly exchange of ministry and the proclamation of the gospel ... these are instruments of faithful teaching and they form the basis of our agreements. These are historic decisions that we may not be able to appreciate the significance of these agreements. We need to be careful not to take things for granted.

One of the areas where there have been some good ministry exchanges is interim ministry. Where have we had the grace to affirm and when have we admonished? Lowell Almen shared that the engagement with one another is primary. If we were going to admonish, this would be a serious concern. This would not be the best approach. It is far better to consult with one another. It should not be a judgment approach, when there are differences.

New church starts have not had much attention. This offers a new opportunity for cooperation. How does the full communion agreement inform cooperation and decisions about new church starts and shared ministries? How has the landscape of American church life changed and how can full communion partners address this together?

We need to lift up models that work, e.g. shared ministry or a pastor from one church body serving effectively in another ... and where there are cooperative ministers.

**Plans for the future: what has worked and what has not**

Doug Fromm lifted up some reflections. We met with staffs: heads of communion, global mission, ministry. We should consider this again, because it produces energy. The two groups that have met are FOMS and CARE task forces.

We have had an understanding about licensed ministers and that they are not interchangeable. We had a consultation in PA and another planned for New Jersey. We have discussed a shared liturgy for a pastor who begins to serve.

We have had theological sharing which has been important. An area that needs to be addressed is middle judicatory involvement. A challenge is having people talk with one another about local mission and ministry. We discussed a website that would have documents and opportunities to post information.

One of the challenges is judicatory leaders making sure that the orderly exchange is honored. It is important to follow the agreement. We need to look at the “next generation” of ministry issues, e.g. if a pastor leaves or should not be serving, how do we deal with these situations ... especially when there is an ecumenical ministry issue.

There is the need for continuing education about full communion, orderly exchange, etc. as middle judicatory leaders change. There is the need to communicate with one another, especially when there are issues of misconduct or a record of bad ministry. There is a way for pastors to move from one church body to another. It was observed that we need to move beyond ministry exchange and move into other areas of ministry and mission.

It might be helpful to address terminology used within each church body, e.g. how do we use “formula church?” Admonition and affirmation may be used when we do not agree with what another church body does. Lydia shared that we need to mature more in this area, e.g. have we gone through the full process. How do we help our churches consult theologically, when sharing information that is before a church body, e.g. human sexuality?

How do we use our traditions in a vibrant way to look at what does it mean to be a main line denomination in this day and age? How do we expand the relationship of the full communion agreement to do ministry more effectively? How can we have honest conversation about our commitment and agreements as formula churches?

Two forces that act against the Formula is the reduction of staff in each church body and resources ... and secondly, when we get close to one another in some areas we do not move forward because it says something about our own identity, e.g. worship resources. This goes to the core of identity.

Before looking at the future, we looked at role of the CC? What tasks are ours and what belongs to others? We also identified that we need to know what are meetings/positions are available. Discussion among middle judicatory heads is needed (what we can do together). How do we share best practices?

**Best role for this committee.**

Committee responsibilities that were adopted in September, 1999 were reviewed. These had been adopted by the heads of churches and are a given. It was suggested that the heads of communion should be invited to review the 6 responsibilities that had been adopted. Raising awareness to help us carry out the Formula agreement and facilitate interchurch activities for renewal and mission was suggested.

In December, 2004, the heads of communion did meet with ecumenical officers. Sacramental, orderly exchange, etc. was discussed, but they emphasized the importance of theological dialogue about evangelism, mission, and faith questions. Current issues were also discussed (e.g. human sexuality, Israel-Palestine, etc.) How are we asking our full communion partners to live out what it means to be in communion with one another?

It was affirmed that our role is to keep the Formula of Agreement and our mutual ministry before us. We are a watch dog to help our communions think ecumenically. It was suggested that we not be the organizing group but rather a conduit for looking at what is and might happen ... and keep awareness before our churches of developments.

A suggestion was made that we could have some exchange of sending a representative or representatives to one another's judicatory leaders group, e.g. conference ministers, conference of bishops, executive presbyters, stated clerks. The rationale would be to have greater visitation among one another's church bodies, leaders bodies, etc. Various ways of approaching each church body to make sure that this was on the agenda were shared.

We need to collect and share stories of what is happening.

**Keeping in mind the 6 recommendations, the LRCC looked toward the future.**

What more do we want to encourage as a CC our denominations to do for the health of our congregational mission. The gathering in Pennsylvania and the one planned in New Jersey were given as examples, but what more needs to be done.

Resources that one another have produced could be shared. Belhar was given as an example, which deals with unity, confession, and justice issues (Reformed Church in America). There is a good congregational study guide. It is accepted as a provisional confession in the RCA (a fourth confessional agreement that will be adopted in 2010).

How in general do we share resources? We need to keep people up to date about what is before our church bodies, e.g. Belhar, ELCA Human Sexuality draft.

One suggestion was to have people from each of our churches meet together to see processes used, what we can learn from one another. How do our churches understand the implications of our Formula of Agreement? This is relevant when the churches have issues before us and how we would involve one another. Is the FOA indispensable or dispensable when we have issues, concerns, or opportunities before us? What role do we have as a coordinating committee when there may be a question about the position from one another church body?

Once again, the need to meet with the heads of communion was lifted up, so we could review direction, the six recommendations, etc. It might be a possibility to suggest a date with the heads of communion retreat in December or around the NCCC meeting in November. It was stated that if we had the heads of communion to be in dialogue with us, this would be helpful in identifying our role (even to pushing our HOC and supporting them in doing what needed to be one). We will request that the HOC meet with the ecumenical officers and possibly members of the CC.

Sharing information and bringing people from each church body together for a particular discussion was identified as a role that we could provide, i.e. human sexuality was the highlighted area. The expectations for this type of meeting will be important (sharing resources, decisions that we have before us, etc.). We were reminded that “affirmation and admonition” is a principle that could be used in this discussion.

Intentional sharing of resources will be encouraged by each of our church bodies. We need to bring together middle judicatory leaders for the FOA and for the sake of enriching congregations.

The proposed Consultation on Tradition and Traditions (Theological Authority and Ecclesial Identity in the Face of Cultural and Interpretive Conflicts) by the theological group was discussed. How can we teach our tradition (or traditions)? Noted was the first draft of October 15, 2005. The theology committee is having a conference call on April 11. The LRCC did respond to the proposal.

Two questions were raised about the theology committee: 1. Is this the committee to do the theological issues? 2. What are the theological questions before our church bodies (not sex)? It was suggested that a representative from the theology group, FOAMS and CARE groups to attend to our next CC meeting. Theology is a mandate in the FOA. We might want to raise up other theology groupings to look at other issues.

Other issues around theology: what theological studies are going on in each of our church bodies need to be identified? Flagging differences that still remain among us should not be lost. This should be referred to theology committee for assessment.

Page 6

An out growth of the formula would be the role of theological education in seminaries. Encourage theological partners to continue and perhaps locate in seminaries, clusters of FOA partners, etc.

The staff from each church body for middle judicatories would be asked to develop a strategy for sharing ministry exchangeability, the materials available, and how we would provide education for these middle judicatory leaders. Coordinating an understanding of structure, full communion relationships, etc.

Ecumenical officers and staff for those who relate to middle judicatories will meet (by phone or in person) to:

Have familiarity of how each functions ... and ... following the FOA (e.g. exchangeability of ministers) so that we are keeping what can and cannot be done. O

Don will contact Mark Hanson to invite HOC to meet with CC.

Paul will deal with charts/structures/relationships of each church body.

Theology group will be contacted by Lydia.

Robina will contact middle judicatory/ecumenical staff for a meeting.

Doug will consider how to convene a group around sexuality (staff, process).

Who is on what committees? Look at vacancies and make appointments.

Meeting every 9 months was to be the pattern. December 17 -18 was set as a possibility with the meeting beginning at 10 a.m. and concluding at 3 p.m. on the 18<sup>th</sup> in Washington DC. This was suggested in order to meet with HOC.

Appreciation was extended to Lowell Almen for his coordination and role over the 10 years. There was a strong affirmation of the difference that Lowell had made in initiating the agreement and in supporting the full communion agreement. He offered thanks for the CC for faithfully serving through these important years of the agreement.