LUTHERAN-REFORMED COORDINATING COMMITTEE

October 20-21, 2005

Reformed Church in America

New York, NY

NEXT MEETINGS: May 15-16, 2006 (noon to 3:00 p.m.) hosted by the ELCA in Chicago
February 8-9, 2007 (noon to 3:00 p.m.) hosted by the PCUSA, place TBA

Present: Lynn Japinga, Robina Winbush, Jack Lynes, Randy Lee, Lowell Almen, Tom Fiet, Jim Sanders, Judy Cobb, Doug Fromm, Lydia Veliko
Guests: Al Janssen, Craig Settlage, Gregg Mast, Dwayne Jackson

The **agenda** was adopted as presented.

Minutes
The minutes from the November 2004 meeting were approved as presented.

Personal and communion updates
Fromm invited members to introduce themselves and share personal updates. It was reported that Rocky Laha (PCUSA) was unable to be present due to a leg injury. Fromm then invited members to share updates from the churches, particularly focused on activities of the summer.

UCC
Veliko shared that the denomination collected overwhelming financial support for relief work as a result of the tsunami and hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but that these contributions also accounted for a significant shortfall in basic support funding for the first half of the year, and it is unclear whether this income would be recovered by the end of the fiscal year. In addition, congregations are experiencing significantly higher insurance premiums (both building and health) and in many cases are unable to contribute at the rate originally budgeted. National ministries, therefore, experience the same fiscal uncertainty and need to set priorities for programs for the coming fiscal year.

General Synod 25 (July 1-5, 2005) received three particularly high-profile issues for discussion. The first, a proposal for multiple-paths to preparation for ordained ministry, was more a matter of internal concern but has significant ramifications for the overall health of pastoral ministry in the denomination. For several years the church has reviewed the normative expectations for how people are trained for ministry in light of sensitivity to cultural needs, demographic realities, and financial concerns, and has convened conversations (which have included ecumenical partners) about whether to affirm, through General Synod, more than one path to preparation for ordained ministry. While acknowledging that the traditional pattern of an undergraduate degree and a master's program in a school of theology will remain normative, the proposal recommended the formalization of regional programs which would include models of more intentional mentoring. Much of this already occurs and General Synod delegates clearly expressed affirmation, but also

a very strong expectation of rigor and accountability regardless of the path. Delegates were reminded that this is a beginning, not the end, and that much work remained in detailing what shape these additional paths should take.

The second issue related to resolutions on marriage equality. While there was much public spotlight on this issue, and there were significant differences of opinion, Veliko reported that delegates discussed the issue with maturity and respect. The overwhelming vote in favor of advocating for marriage equality (thereby advocating for legal rights for same-gender committed couples) does not mean that there is no division within the UCC on this matter. Leaders were aware, of course, that there would be concern among some ecumenical partners, and Veliko asked that there be time for discussion of how to engage this question within the Formula.

The third issue focused on the resolutions related to the use of economic leverage with companies doing business to support the occupation in Palestine. In the wake of the difficulties experienced by the PCUSA's 2004 vote to study phased, selective divestment from companies which profit from the occupation in Israel/Palestine, UCC delegates knew this would be a difficult conversation. There are differences of opinion among members of the UCC and three Conferences forwarded resolutions for delegates to consider. The final vote of the Synod was to affirm exploring the use of economic leverage, which could include positive investment, shareholder activism, divestment, and other means of influence. Veliko noted that many good initiatives among Jewish and Christian leaders are currently underway. She said that as is the case with most ecumenical partners, the desire to speak words of support for justice for Palestinians on the one hand and to nurture the long-standing and cherished relationships with members of the Jewish community on the other sometimes feel like diametrically opposed efforts, but both must be maintained.

<u>PCUSA</u>

Winbush reported that this was the first year in the new pattern of biennial assemblies for the PCUSA, with 2005 being a year without a General Assembly. As a result of learning about a model from the RCA, the denomination instead held a national pastor's retreat in Utah attended by approximately 700. It was a time of rest and renewal strongly affirmed by participants, and one which helped pastors develop relationships across geographic and theological boundaries. One disappointment was that it was not as racially or ethnically diverse as was hoped for, but expectations are that subsequent events participation will be more representative of the church as a whole.

A second area of significant work for the denomination has been related to issues of "steps toward peace" in Israel/Palestine, named by the 2004 General Assembly as a study about selective phased divestment from companies profiting from the occupation in Israel/Palestine. Winbush said that this has created controversy both within and outside the PCUSA and has resulted in many conversations with leaders in the American Jewish community. She noted that there are helpful materials on the PCUSA website outlining the various aspects of the denomination's process since the General Assembly in 2004. Most recently (August 5, 2005), the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee (MRTI) identified 5 companies for closer examination as to their policies in the region (Caterpillar, Citigroup, ITT Industries,

Motorola and United Industries). The website also includes the rationale for the selection of these particular companies and the various possible options for exercising economic leverage.

Finally, in August the theological task force on "Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church" produced a report with recommendations related to human sexuality which will be presented to the General Assembly for action. The church already has begun to receive feedback to the report. For some, Winbush said, even more significant than the recommendations themselves was the process undertaken by the task group to develop the report, a process which included careful listening and respect for a very diverse set of theological perspectives. One question that now being asked is whether this kind of process can be replicated in 172 presbyteries.

One prevailing message from the task group is that the church must stay together no matter how significant the disagreement. While the report recommends no change to the constitutional standards prohibiting the ordination of gays and lesbians, it asks the church to issue a new authoritative interpretation of the power of the presbyteries to make decisions about fitness for ministry based on the missional needs in that place and the gifts of each individual. This, she said, is the closest thing that the PCUSA has to "local option." On all issues except for those involving human sexuality, it is the practice to allow presbyteries to make exceptions for candidates fit for ministry. Except for issues related to human sexuality, a presbytery rarely involves itself in the ordination of a deacon or an elder.

What the General Assembly will do with the report in 2006 is yet to be seen. A task related to these discussions falls to the Constitutional Services office which is reviewing the parameters for ordinations and installations and identifying what is permissible within those agreed parameters.

Report of the Theology Committee

Al Janssen, one of the RCA representatives to the Theology Committee, presented two documents from their September meeting. One was a draft titled "Practices and Protocols for the Sake of Ongoing Theological Dialogue Between Formula of Agreement Partners" and the other was a draft of the proposed consultation on "Tradition and Traditions" (texts attached).

<u>Practices and Protocols</u>

Janssen named three arenas where the committee felt it was necessary to articulate protocols to facilitate the ongoing commitment to theological deliberation within the Formula:

1. Commitment to engaging partners on theological discussions within each partner church
2. Commitment to ongoing dialogue on topics of theological difference or disagreement
3. Commitment to fostering dialogue on topics of mutual concern in society/the church/the world

In the first arena, Janssen noted the committee's hope that each communion will increase its commitment to include representatives from Formula churches whenever issues of significant theological import are discussed, or when programs or projects which have theological focus are developed. The LRCC agreed both that this was important and that each communion must continue to monitor the ways in which that commitment is carried.

In the second arena, the theology committee hopes there will always be a project or discussion among the four churches related to a theological issue where there is enduring difference. They believe that in this way the partners will continue to practice the discipline of collaborative deliberation without which difficult issues could become areas of significant tensions, and by which we may continue to learn from each other.

The third arena is represented most clearly by the proposal (second part of Janssen's report to the LRCC): the desire that there always be a project, unrelated to areas of tension or disagreement, where the four churches are engaged in theological deliberation.

While the theology committee sees itself as the body which would "birddog" this aspect of the commitment in the Formula, said Janssen, the committee believes that ultimate responsibility for oversight rests with the LRCC, and that the denominations are responsible for naming the specific participants to discussions or programs outlined in "Practices and Protocols." In this way, the committee understands itself to have the primary responsibility for urging, encouraging, developing and coordinating; the LRCC as having primary responsibility for holding the communions accountable for maintaining the commitments; and the denominations as having primary responsibility for identifying the appropriate representatives for the various tables. In this way, there will not be a generic "pool of resource persons" but rather each church would choose the people most suited to the particular topic from within the communion.

Winbush offered a recent example from the PCUSA and asked for clarification. Recently the PCUSA discussed undertaking a study of the Belhar Confession, and the question was raised about doing that with the RCA. For a number of institutional reasons, it was decided to engage the study as a single denomination. Winbush asked Janssen if the report from the theology committee represented a desire for more than that. Janssen said no, they were clear that there were times when each denomination would need to follow its own course, but that it urges wherever possible that at least representatives from the other churches be included.

Discussion about the most appropriate way to secure the affirmation of the churches to the "Practice and Protocol" draft ensued. The theology committee has not thought specifically about how this should happen, asked that it be communicated to the churches and that there be affirmation of the basic principles. For some, this will include the consent of the head of communion; for others, the vote of a council or commission. It was noted that in all four churches, to varying degrees, arena #1 is already in practice.

Almen reflected that it is critical to put protocols and practices such as this into regular use because as historic memory of the initial commitments begins to disappear, it will be important that the expectation be written and explicit.

Members noted that the document was an important "blueprint" for the churches' commitment to theological deliberation and would continue to work at living it out in a variety of ways best suited to each communion. **The LRCC took action to forward the draft document "Practices and Protocols for the Sake of Ongoing Theological Dialogue Between Formula of Agreement Partners" to the denominations, through the ecumenical staff person, for reception and affirmation through whatever venues most appropriate. It was also agreed**

that the denominations will report at the May 2006 LRCC meeting with specific examples of implementation.

<u>Proposal for a proposed consultation "Tradition and Traditions: Theological Authority and Ecclesial Identity in the Face of Cultural and Interpretive Conflicts</u>

Janssen reported that the theology committee used as its starting point the conversation at Simpsonwood in 2004. The first concerns were about how we teach each other's traditions in seminaries, as one of the commitments in the Formula; the second was about to how we teach "tradition" at all, recognizing that the authority of tradition and how that is lived out in each communion is different; finally, the committee decided to focus on one aspect of the larger conversation: the authority of scripture in teaching tradition.

(*NB the appended text of the proposal for details*.)

The committee hopes that in addition to its members, each communion would send 5 participants from a variety settings (seminaries [both students and faculty], pastors, judicatory staff and national staff). They will approach the Louisville Institute for the majority of the funding but also will ask denominations for both monetary and in-kind contributions (see attached draft budget). The proposal is shaped around 6 meetings over 2-3 years.

LRCC members expressed their appreciation for the thoughtful and detailed proposal, and offered strong encouragement and affirmation, along with questions and recommendations.

Funding
LRCC members asked that the category of "congregation" be removed from the expected funding sources. It was determined that each denomination should contribute to the expenses of the consultation but in those ways best suited its needs and protocols. It was suggested that too much detail would be inappropriate since each church secures such funding along specified guidelines which may or may not include asking local congregations for grants.

Anticipated Outcomes
Winbush and Lee asked that the proposal be expanded to include more concrete outcomes. Both affirmed a publication (book) as important, but suggested that others should be included: e.g., ecumenical formation for young adult seminarians, development of common curriculum for congregations. While these are only examples, it was affirmed that a more specific list of outcomes would help secure funding.

Lynes and Veliko suggested that outcomes could be categorized in stages. First stages might include ecumenical formation, the production of a scholarly work. Other stages might include the distillation of the scholarly discussion into resources or news items geared for lay members of congregations.

Almen stated that such a consultation would be timely for the ELCA for several reasons. First, the Presiding Bishop has proposed an international LWF consultation on the topic of the interpretation of scripture in light of the rise of fundamentalism, and the loss of awareness of the

hermeneutical principles arising from the Reformation. Second, the Churchwide Assembly approved a plan for a process addressing hermeneutical principles for the ELCA, including methods of scriptural interpretation. This was referred to Almen's office and the proposal from the theology committee could be an element in that broader initiative.

Fromm confirmed the timeliness for the RCA, stating that as the denomination begins a study on homosexuality (the first part of which includes a discussion of hermeneutics), it would be important to have a broader dialogue on interpretation as well. He believes that members of RCA congregations want guidance about how to think through complex issues. Fiet concurred, stating that for the RCA at this time, it is not possible to overstate the importance of a cogent approach to scripture. "Tradition," he said, often has no meaning to people who are not theologically trained, but "scripture" and its interpretation definitely does.

Japinga, Sanders and Fiet hoped that many of the concrete outcomes listed be aimed particularly at members and pastors of local congregations. Fiet said that much of what is taught is heard from the pulpit, and that whatever emerges from the consultation should be easily adaptable to a format that pastors and lay leaders could access.

Janssen said it would be best to wait until the theology committee has a chance to make the suggested revisions prior to members sharing the proposal more broadly with seminary and college leaders.

Winbush wondered if it was possible for the fruits of such a consultation to aid in the ongoing education of commissioned lay pastors. While there are educational programs available in each presbytery, she felt that the consultation could provide important resources for such programs.

Almen suggested that the consultation could provide an analysis of the predominant hermeneutics in US society, recognizing that our churches and members are as influenced by that as by what is preached in church. Lee continued, noting the typo in the text of the proposal (dated the year 200) and said that it was a reminder of what happened in that early Christian era: the canon was in the process of being established in response to the emerging chaos of Christianity and hermeneutics. 1800 years later, he noted, we struggle with the same thing.

LRCC members were concerned with the timetable, feeling that the fall of 2006 was too ambitious. Spring 2007 was suggested, giving everyone time to secure participants who could commit to the 6-meeting format, as well as time for the denominations to identify how communicate the results of the consultation in an accessible way, useful for members of local churches – perhaps through the vehicle of denominational publications or websites. There was discussion about whether the number of sessions was too large to be manageable for participants, but Lee suggested that it be thought of as a dialogue (though not in that format), thereby requiring denominations to choose participants who could make a commitment like those who agree to participate in multi-session bilateral dialogues.

Veliko suggested that a prospectus, much like that used to launch a bilateral dialogue, be developed for next stage of preparation for the consultation. LRCC members agreed.

Cobb asked whether the proposed format called for people to be brought together to hear "outside speakers" on the topic, or whether those 28 participants would themselves provide the material for the discussion. Janssen said the committee thought so specifically yet and he will take the question back for consideration.

He did, however, indicate that proposed 28 participants would *not* be the same group who take the theological deliberation and create from it educational materials for curriculum, websites or denominational publications – this should be another group. Members of the LRCC concurred, and Winbush suggested the involvement of staff from the denominations (such as a communications staff person or those) who could "eavesdrop" on the conversations for the purposes of making it accessible to a wider audience.

Recommendations to the theology committee

The LRCC voted in principle enthusiastic affirmation of the proposed consultation with the following recommendations to the theology committee:

- **That the current draft be revised to reflect some of the discussion noted above;**

- **That a next stage of preparation be the creation of a one-page *prospectus* (ecumenical officers agreed to consult with members of the committee as to the shape these often take) which would outline in more concrete terms both the goals and the specific outcomes anticipated;**

- **That an area for additional development relates to strategies for the reception process – so that the churches "walk with" the consultation, not "receive the fruits" only after it is completed. It was noted that this is a "both/and" proposition. Clearly a significant portion of the results would come after the full consultation, but it is recommended that there be ways to use creative media so that the churches can be made aware of the discussions at various stages;**

- **That the date for the consultation be moved to the spring of 2007;**

- **That a representative from the theology committee share a report with the LRCC at its May 2006 meeting in Chicago;**

Ecumenical officers will work with the leadership of the NCC Faith and Order commission to ensure that these events do not conflict, though it was noted that since the spring of 2007 will only be the beginning of the consultation, it is unlikely that this would occur.

The members of the LRCC expressed their gratitude to Janssen and members of the theology committee and asked that thanks be conveyed to the committee through him.

As an aside, Fromm asked if the LRCC should consider a common terminology for "committees" or "working groups." While the matter was not settled, there was consensus that this should be done.

Friday October 21

Tom Fiet led opening prayers.

Ministry Committee Report

The LRCC was joined by Gregg Mast (RCA) and Craig Settlage (ELCA) who shared a report of "FOAMS" (Formula of Agreement Ministry Staff). In November 2004 the staff had held a meeting concurrent with the last meeting of the LRCC and had joined the LRCC for an afternoon to discuss matters related to ministry and leadership in the Formula at some length.

As a result of that meeting FOAMS decided to focus on the question of how smaller congregations (those with an average Sunday worship of 50 or fewer) obtain and retain pastoral services and explore what the Formula relationship could contribute to leadership and leadership development in these settings. [Mast reported that the statistics in the denominations regarding numbers of these congregations is 25% in the RCA, 25% in the ELCA, 25% UCC, and 47% in the PCUSA. They distributed sample maps showing the Pennsylvania demographics for each of the 4 denominations. The trend indicates that there will be more every year.]

Settlage reported that in late 2004 the ELCA had itself begun a close analysis of this kind, including an examination of clergy compensation, worship attendance, and demographics in the specific region. The bishops responded with a desire for further work to develop strategies for maintaining an educated clergy, since procuring ordained, seminary trained leadership in these very small congregations is often difficult. A program called TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) provides a non-M.Div. track of preparation leading to ordained ministry. In addition, the ELCA provides for a category of licensed or authorized ministry known as "synodically authorized ministry." Persons who serve in this category are lay persons authorized by a synodical bishop to provide Word and sacrament ministry in a specific time and place and cannot transfer from one setting to another.

All four denominations face similar concerns and are developing, in some cases, parallel strategies. The difficulty of procuring seminary trained pastors has resulted in the creation of lay leader training programs and procedures so that these settings can be served. FOAMS found a concentration of such congregations for all of the denominations in Pennsylvania and New York. They chose Pennsylvania as one region where they could explore how collaborative effort might enhance the ability for all four churches to provide trained pastoral leadership.

Settlage and Mast said that their conversation with the LRCC would focus on two separate but very related concerns, both of which may be addressed in the proposed study: the procurement of seminary trained ministers of word and sacrament for these small congregations, and the training of lay leaders to be equipped to serve in a certain time and place when the judicatory determines that this is the best (or sometimes only) way to meet the needs of the community. (Text of report attached.)

They reiterated, in response to a comment by Almen, that the goal of such collaboration would not be to reverse a decision that the orderly exchange would be open to this group of lay leaders (all of our denominations have a similar category), but rather to see what might be possible for

collaborative training in an area where there is a similar demographic. Almen stated that he thought it preferable to find ways to use each other's ordained ministers to fill these needs rather than to explore the possibility of exchangeability of authorized/licensed/commissioned pastors. This was not included as a protocol of the Formula because there was not, and still is not, comparability in patterns of preparation or criteria for authorization and if a difficulty arose with any of these leaders, the liability of the denominations and the congregations would be enormous.

Following reflections from the LRCC, the FOAMS will reconvene (November 19-20 in Louisville) to clarify the proposal (see text attached) and be in contact with appropriate judicatory leaders and seminaries. It was noted that New Brunswick Seminary should be included because it is the seminary which trains the majority of the pastors serving the Pennsylvania area for the RCA.

Almen reported that this comes at a critical time for the ELCA because the cost of health care and seminary tuition makes it so difficult for these smaller congregations to provide leadership. Veliko added that a report from the Insurance Board of the UCC makes it clear that the skyrocketing price of liability insurance for buildings and clergy makes it impossible for many of these smaller congregations to call pastors with full time or even half-time salaries. Fromm added that the cost of utilities will only exacerbate the situation.

While he understands the good reasons for not allowing orderly exchange of authorized/ commissioned/lay pastors, Lynes hopes that at least the question of common training might be explored more fully. He believes that much of what is required by such training is held in common and that it should not be difficult to agree at least on a standard curriculum. Even if it is not possible to "exchange" these leaders, at least it could lay the groundwork for common expectations. Common training might also procure students in sufficient numbers that seminaries or other institutions would find it worthwhile to provide academic services. Mast agreed and pointed to a program already in existence in the Albany, NY area which received a Lilly grant to do this. Veliko reported that the NY Conference of the UCC has had a long history of theological training for lay leaders, often leading to licensure (service which is time/place bound), and that the Conference has contracted with the UCC's Lancaster Seminary in Pennsylvania to provide a solid theological base for the training sessions. She observed that in this way, the proposed focus on Pennsylvania's judicatories and seminaries was pertinent.

FOAMS' hope is to identify a pilot area and to create two or three models which could then be projected into the rest of the country to encourage other settings to work on these issues.

Settlage admitted that they don't yet know how realistic it is that our denominations can overcome history and attachment to identity as it relates to preparation, but feel as staff with responsibility in this area that the situation is so urgent that they must assist congregations in any way possible to provide well-trained ministers of word and sacrament. They believe that this should be one of the visible fruits of the Formula and the recognition of ministries. If the ability to offer common training for commissioned/licensed/authorized pastors emerges as well, so much the better.

Cobb agreed and noted that already in Pennsylvania the seminaries are already offering credit to each other's students where geography makes it easier for students to attend one rather than the other. This continued cooperation, she says, is critical both to the ability to produce well-educated students and to sustain the seminaries. Sanders noted that the University of Dubuque has offered a good distance-learning program with multiple tracks and is fully ecumenical.

Mast believes the seminaries are at a critical point, and that ecumenical cooperation and cross-fertilization, as well as assisting with lay training programs, can be seen either as competition or as the ability to procure more "market share." If they can see it as market, they will likely be able to attract additional students, because may of these authorized students eventually return to seminary for full degrees and ordination. Settlage agreed that there is a legitimate concern from seminary staff, as regional programs are developed, that their important role in theological education in America will be diminished, and that this recent trend signals the beginning of their demise. But denominational staff, while sympathetic to this concern and not wanting to abandon a seminary degree as normative for the training of pastors for our churches, want to encourage the seminaries to offer their expertise in those areas where judicatories will create programs through other venues if seminary assistance is not available. Veliko noted the same conversations in the UCC, that the seminaries have been largely supportive of helping to find creative solutions while holding in front of the church the concern that theological education not become optional for the training of pastors.

Mast reported that the majority these churches in Pennsylvania are found in rural settings, but some are clustered in and around the cities as well. From the perspective of the global church, the American church scene is considered luxurious. In many parts of the world (places, incidentally, where the church is growing rapidly) a pastor takes oversees the care of 20 or more congregations, and elders or deacons care for daily pastoral needs. So the accommodation, via the training of lay leaders, is late in coming to the US and should not be seen as an automatic prohibition on the ability of the church to flourish. The question is how to maintain standards of education while recognizing that patterns will probably have to change. Fromm said this will require a radical shift in what congregations assume they need. They are accustomed to thinking of a pastor as "theirs" are often preoccupied in asking whether that person is meeting "their" specific needs. What feels like a chaotic, loosely organized "mess" can perhaps become more coherent if we change our assumptions about what a pastor's role is in a "parish."

Almen noted that in addition to the fears voiced by the seminaries is one voiced by many synods: that a change in thinking which would require congregations to release their "own" person to be shared by others might lead to accepting "the educationally easy way out." He shares some of that fear with the proliferation of synodically authorized ministers, especially from an ecumenical perspective. The question of "orders" is critical to ecumenical recognition, and if we are not very careful in the way we authorize people as ministers of word and sacrament who are not ordained, we may be in ecumenical difficulty. For that reason he encourages the focus on ecumenical sharing of *regularly* authorized ministers of word and sacrament than an emphasis on the use of locally authorized leaders. He has heard lay leaders also say that if their congregations are to be viable in 5 or 10 years, they must have the freedom to share pastors.

Fiet reflected, however, that if this pattern is to become one on which the denominations rely (sharing of pastors and yoking congregations), the churches must be willing to review the compensation for these clergy because it is unjust to expect that they will work for the same, sometimes substandard, salaries as a person with one charge.

Veliko reflected on Lynes' hope that we would not completely eliminate the possibility, even some years into the future, of the exchange of locally authorized leaders, if comparability of standards and procedures were established. She agreed that at present it is both impossible and unwise, but asked that we retain as much ecumenical imagination as possible for the future. One of the questions we must ask ourselves is not "how will our ecumenical partners respond to our procedures and policies" but whether we can explain our policies and protocols to our ecumenical partners in a way that communicates their integrity. If we cannot do this, then we shouldn't be practicing it in our own households.

Lee agreed, said we need to put our own shops in order prior to exchanging with others, and must maintain accountability within our own denominations. Sanders reflected that vision and accountability must go hand in hand if the church is to have healthy pastoral leadership.

Fromm drew the LRCC back to the 5 points of the proposal and asked Settlage and Mast to offer concluding comments.

Settlage said that the ministry staff consider the 3rd point to be the focus of their common work for the next year, and have agreed, with the concurrence of the LRCC, to build on what the ELCA has done, centering the pilot in Pennsylvania. They recognize that the study is ambitious and involves complex issues and multiple partners including seminaries. It is expected that the pilot would include as many as six seminaries in the region.

When they have a more concrete plan after November 20 they will share the information with the regional judicatory leaders, and as the pilot progresses, will share the information with other judicatories throughout the country so that what is learned can benefit the whole.

The LRCC expressed its thanks to the ministry staff and indicated that a report from a representative in May to share progress would be welcomed and invited.

The LRCC recessed for 15 minutes.

CARE Report

The LRCC welcomed Dwayne Jackson, Minister for Social Witness and Social Justice for the RCA, who sits at the CARE table comprised of staff and appointed leaders in racial and ethnic ministries for the Formula churches. The most recent meeting of CARE was held in Mesa, AZ and was attended by approximately 25 people. The focus of the gathering was on issues of multiculturalism in our churches. The meeting began with a presentation by Jackie Lewis who asked the group to divide into racial and ethnic groups based on self-identified categories. Next Lewis lead discussion about how the members saw themselves and each other; this conversation moved from a personal one to an exploration of what it means to exist in a multicultural environment. Gone are the days, Jackson said, where "multiracial and multicultural" refers only

to integrating predominantly white churches. Churches of other racial and ethnic communities also experience a need to acknowledge multiculturalism as demographics in all settings change significantly. No longer is it the case, he noted, that a predominantly African American neighborhood will contain only African American churches, because alongside those neighborhoods, and entering those churches, are Hispanic members, Asian American and Asian born members, as well as African born members, all bringing with them a cultural reality that must be respected and which will enrich the community. Neighborhoods change, gentrification in some areas dramatically changes the shape of the communities because some can no longer afford to reside where they were raised, and others move in with no attachment to the history of the neighborhood. This sometimes causes tension among communities and allows them to be weakened as they experience internal fighting. The respect and integration, however, will not happen automatically, and if it is not attended to with intentionality, congregations will become commuter churches and will eventually die.

CARE members then heard a presentation on border ministries in the US, particularly with Mexican immigrants, and this sparked a long conversation about the need to attend more carefully to racism as it relates to immigration policies and the adequacy of our denominational immigration ministries. Many congregations in the area, he reported, are comprised of members without legal immigration papers and thus subject to expulsion and treatment without due process of law. All four churches reported that they have some staff working on issues of immigration law and procurement of visas, which is becoming more and more difficult.

Finally, CARE heard a report about ministries in Honduras and how our global consciousness is changing our understanding of ministry.

Jackson reported that there have been plans underway for a joint convocation of the racial/ethnic caucuses of the Formula churches, originally planned for the summer of 2007, but this has been postponed due to the complexity of the discussion about multiculturalism. The CARE steering group wishes to explore the implications of that conversation further before plans proceed.

Cobb asked if CARE staff have considered how a congregation can live within its “new” setting as demographics change. Jackson responded that helping congregations more faithfully reflect settings in which they live is one among the many workshops proposed for a joint convocation. He noted that being gracious and open is a very important first step, but if it stops there, the initiative has failed.

He reported on an additional meeting of “Ecumenical Justice Partners and Partners Plus,” comprised of staff containing portfolios like Jackson’s gather to discuss common concerns and develop collaborative projects. They are planning for the development of a resource for children and youth on overcoming racism in church, school and community. The next meeting is January 29-31, 2006 and will be held in Cleveland, Ohio.

Members of the LRCC asked whether intra-denominational issues of racism and the dynamics of communities competing for resources is a part of the discussion at the CARE table. Jackson reported that this has been a topic of discussion in the past and anticipates that more conversation will occur in subsequent meetings.

Others asked Jackson if the Formula staff related to racial and ethnic ministries generally invite each other to participate in or at least observe "internal" denominational programs or projects, stating that such cross-fertilization has been helpful in other areas of Formula work. Jackson said this has been named as a goal, and is happening in some areas. However, he said, changing patterns is difficult, and this has been most notable related to the attempt to schedule a joint convocation. A more modest approach has been to have the executive committees of each of the racial/ethnic caucuses hold meetings concurrently, coming together periodically for joint sessions of sharing and strategizing. This has been very successful and over time will likely lead to more collaboration and joint meetings in larger and larger groups.

Another question related to the status of Native American ministries in each of the denominations. Jackson indicated that he could only report accurately for the RCA, which had a caucus for Native American congregations but this network is no longer operating. The UCC, ELCA and PCUSA all report networks and/or staff in some capacity which relate to the Native American communities in the US.

The LRCC thanked Jackson for an excellent report and looked forward to receiving a report from a member of CARE at its May 2006 meeting in Chicago.

The Committee adjourned for lunch.

After lunch Veliko was elected moderator of the LRCC for the next triennium, term to begin in May 2006. **Lee agreed to take minutes at the May meeting. It was agreed that the responsibility for moderator would rotate through each of the four communions rather than alternating between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.**

Fromm then initiated a conversation, introduced the previous day, about the ecumenical implications for the various votes on human sexuality. (Note reports above and below.)

Veliko feels it is critical for the LRCC to have a sense of how it, or the denominations, will respond in the event that one denomination wishes to sever ties with another due to recent votes on human sexuality. She feels it is important for the LRCC and the leaders of the four communions to be as proactive as possible, or at least to know how it will react in such an event. In addition, she is aware that there are inquiries on both sides about pastors and congregations wishing to change affiliations due to these votes, and it will be important to state ecumenical protocols for these occasions.

Winbush understands that a church could choose one of two things: it could ask to sever ties with ONE of the Formula churches, or it could ask to remove itself from the Formula. It is critical, she said, that the leadership of the four churches agree on whether the first option is permissible. If there is an issue between two churches, she asked, what becomes the responsibility of the Formula? How do we have transparency so that we allow the *Formula* to speak rather than allowing the discussion to become an issue between two of the partners? Her larger concern is that in the Formula we have already declared differences on issues of human sexuality not to be church-dividing, and we must be consistent with this prior decision.

Almen said that although the ELCA had, for reasons of ecumenical policy, to vote on each relationship, once voted it was understood that it was the "Formula" relationship which was operative, not three individual bilateral full communion agreements. Because the denominations remain responsible for their internal life and decision making, the Formula has built into it the safeguards necessary for those times when the denominations disagree on policy, and does not see the differences as needing to cause difficulty.

Lee believes that since the issue of human sexuality was determined in the Formula to be one where there are persistent but not church-dividing differences, these questions require ongoing consultation, not procedures to sever ties. The only issues on which severing ties could be legitimately considered would be those related to communions retracted statements on agreed doctrines of the faith, upon which the Formula is predicated. Issues of morality and ethics are not included in the Formula, and therefore are issues for the realm of ongoing consultation.

Winbush and Lynes asked if there is need for a consultation to consider this proactively rather than wait to be in reactive mode. While Almen cautioned that such a move might make more of the issue than is currently present, Fromm indicated that it is clear to him that there *will* be overtures to the RCA General Synod to sever ties and that it would be best to be prepared for how we will respond. He believes that the way this will be presented will be through an overture to be in relationship only with the ELCA, particularly if the PCUSA votes on an action that is perceived to "hold the door open" for the possibility of ordination of gays and lesbians. He believes that the center will hold even when pressed, but wants to be prepared. The presence of ecumenical officers and representatives at the General Synod, he said, has been a critically important element in the character of the discussions. In response to a question from Fiet, Fromm confirmed that the expectation is that while the three-year study progresses, all overtures asking the church to rule on a matter related to issues covered in the study would be ruled out of order – but wishes to be prepared. The consistency of the vote on marriage equality in the UCC's General Synod with the trajectory of the past, said Japinga, will not stop some from submitting overtures.

Veliko reiterated that there are two questions for consideration, both of which are important but require different discussions. The first is how we respond to overtures or other official requests for severing the relationship, and the need to determine, officially and for the record, whether it is possible to sever ties with one communion in the Formula and still remain in the Formula. The second question is how we articulate an ecumenical protocol to help judicatory leaders respond to pastors and congregations desiring to move to another Formula church because of actions within their own denomination.

Veliko agreed to draft a protocol for review to be used by judicatory leaders in response to inquiries about changing affiliation. Ecumenical officers also agreed to remain after the noon adjournment of the May 2-4, 2006 ecumenical officers' retreat, departing on the morning of the 5th, to review any official actions coming before any of the churches and determine an ecumenical response. Prior to that each agreed to consult within their own denomination as to what the official understanding is about whether one denomination can sever ties with another and yet remain in the Formula.

2004 heads of communion/ecumenical officers meeting

Fromm distributed the agenda for the 2004 meeting between Formula heads of communion and ecumenical officers. He reported a good conversation, and that the group discussed, as per the request of the LRCC, possibility for the 10 year anniversary celebration. Fromm said that there was affirmation but significant concern about the capacity to carry it off.

10 year anniversary celebration

The LRCC discussed many possibilities for celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Formula. National, regional, and local church options were considered. There was consensus that one essential element must be resources and encouragement for each local congregation to celebrate the anniversary on the same day (ideally in ecumenical groupings but if that is not possible, perhaps through pulpit exchanges, etc.). Winbush and Lynes suggested that the materials developed by Enslin for the 5th anniversary be reviewed and updated so as not to reinvent the wheel, and that we target Reformation Sunday in 2008, emphasizing unity on that day rather than a commemoration of division. There was discussion about the feasibility of six or eight regional events instead of one national one. While that might energize certain judicatory leaders, it was thought that this would not motivate or interest local leaders any more than one national celebration would.

The committee agreed to invite representatives of the seminaries in the Chicago area (PCUSA, ELCA and UCC) to the May meeting to discuss the involvement of the seminaries in a national celebration, and the ecumenical officers agreed to more conversation about how to resource such an event (secondment of a staff person, etc.), with a report to the May meeting. Finally, each denomination will share information in May strategies for encouraging and enabling local celebrations.

Summer denominational meetings

The PCUSA General Assembly meets June 15-22, 2006 in Birmingham, AL. The UCC is on rotation to represent the Formula churches at the Assembly.

The RCA General Synod meets June 8-13, 2006 in Pella, IA.

The PCUSA will host the February 8-9, 2007 meeting of the LRCC (beginning at noon on the 8th and ending at 3:00 p.m. on the 9th) at a place to be announced.

Communion updates, continued

<u>ELCA</u>

Almen set his report in the context of the wider work of the ELCA. As with other partners, the ELCA has raised money for disaster relief, including the collection of funds which will be set aside for the longer term projects resulting from the recent hurricanes. Another financial effort relates to the Fund for Leaders in Mission, a scholarship fund to provide full tuition for an increasing number of seminary students. This has been identified as an area of significant need for the long-term health of the church.

The Churchwide Assembly in August 2005 approved the Renewal of Worship project which will result, among other things, in the production of a new worship resource and accompanying material. The book will be called "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" and comes nearly 30 years after the publication of the current "Lutheran Book of Worship." The Churchwide Assembly's business sessions recessed every day at 11:00 for worship, reminding the delegates that the Church is first a body where God is worshiped.

The issue with the highest profile at the Assembly centered on three recommendations about human sexuality:
Action 1 called for "finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion we share as members of the body of Christ. This action was approved.
Action 2 recommended that the church "continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops which finds no basis for establishing an official ceremony for the blessing of a homosexual relationship." However, the Assembly reiterated the welcome to gay and lesbian people and its trust in pastors and congregations "as they discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care for all to whom they minister." This action was approved.
Action 3 was a recommendation to grant the possibility of the ordination to gay and lesbian persons who are not celibate. This proposal would have required individual cases to be brought before a committee of the council of bishops for a vote when a bishop determined that the person's ordination was in the best interest of ministry in a local setting. This action needed a 2/3 vote to pass and was rejected 490-503.

The ELCA now enters a new phase of work during which a draft of a "social policy statement" will be developed, due to be brought before the Churchwide Assembly in 2009.

<u>RCA</u>
Fromm reported that last spring a new worship resource was published called "Sing a New Creation," as one piece in an ongoing effort to develop new liturgical material for congregations.

The General Synod in June 2005 approved "Our Call," a ten year plan organized around the goals of revitalization, multiplication (of congregations and members), discipleship, leadership, and mission. This was seen by some as a helpful plan to unify the denomination with a focus on positive goals.

The central issue for the Synod surrounded the trial of Norman Kansfield, retired president of New Brunswick Seminary in New Jersey who performed a marriage ceremony for one of his daughters in Massachusetts in the summer of 2004. The charges against Kansfield were found proven and the discipline included his deposition from the office of professor of theology (this is a 4th office, found in the RCA) and his suspension as Minister of Word and Sacrament. This was an extremely painful event in the life of the church and all of those involved. As a result of internal disagreement on issues of human sexuality, delegates voted to begin a three year denomination-wide study on homosexuality and the church's various ecclesial stands (for additional information see above, discussion on the ecumenical implications of decisions on human sexuality).

The General Synod engaged in plenary reflection on the Belhar Confession which arose out of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa as a result of apartheid. The RCA is currently considering the addition of Belhar as a fourth official confession of the denomination. Fromm noted that the process for doing such a thing is not entirely clear, and distributed a one-page document which drafts a possible plan. The proposed process allows for an initial 5 year *provisional* acceptance period after which the General Synod would be required to take action. While Belhar is not related to the specific theological issues raised in the 16th century confessions, it is seen by many to be compatible with the convictions found in them.

Finally, the General Synod adopted a paper outlining an agreement for the "orderly exchange" of ministers of word and sacrament between the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The CRCNA had previously adopted the same paper. This is the most recent in a series of actions designed to bring these two denominations closer in mission and ministry.

Fromm then invited Lee to close the meeting with prayer, and the LRCC was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lydia Veliko
Secretary

28 October 2005