NEXT STEPS IN COMMON
2019 Churchwide Assembly actions
that connect with our life together

In this first of four reports, we focus on two actions taken by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly and how they intersect with LSTC’s own previous statements and ongoing commitments.

Sanctuary memorial
The Churchwide Assembly adopted a memorial (action CA19.03.11, attached) affirming the denomination’s long-standing commitment to migrants and refugees and declaring the ELCA to be a sanctuary church body. In talking points later released to clarify the assembly’s actions, our church clarified that “In its simplest form, becoming a sanctuary denomination means that the ELCA is publicly declaring that walking alongside immigrants and refugees is a matter of faith,” that “being a sanctuary denomination will look different in different in different contexts,” and that “We cannot mandate or direct our congregations and ministries to respond in specific ways. Each must work out what this means for them in their context.”

In our context as a seminary community where our students, staff, faculty and alumni gather from around the globe, where the stories of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers are our own stories, and where people hold different documentation statuses, we have addressed these issues in a variety of ways, including most recently:

- A March 2017 “Joint Policy Statement Regarding Immigration Enforcement” (attached) from LSTC and McCormick seminaries affirming our commitment to the well-being of immigrants in our midst in light of deteriorating conditions then that still persist.
- A February 2019 public church keynote lecture by Dr. Javier Alanis, Director of LSPS, entitled “Borderland Ethics Sin Fronteras: Neighbor Love in Liminal Spaces,” for which Mary Campbell, Director of the ELCA’s AMMPARO strategy, was the respondent.
- A May 2019 prayer vigil and public action prompted by the deportation of LSTC alumna Betty Rendón, at which church leaders and public officials decried the racist and violent policies of family separations and deportations happening at an accelerated rate.

In the months ahead, we will explore with leaders of the AMMPARO strategy how LSTC can distinctly embody the call to be sanctuary through our actions and resources. There are many options we should discern together. Do we have gifts to offer that others cannot? Are there commitments we cannot make without endangering our mission?

Inter-Religious Commitment declaration
In the presence of ecumenical and inter-religious guests, the Assembly adopted a “Declaration of Inter–Religious Commitment” intended to guide ELCA actions to seek mutual understanding and the common good. Dr. Mark Swanson, Professor of Christian–Muslim Studies and Interfaith Relations and Associate Director of our Center of Christian–Muslim Engagement, served on the committee producing this document. This action is especially meaningful when we recall that our seminary community is already profoundly inter–religious. Our students, staff, faculty, and alumni are Christian, Muslim, or have other religious identities. Each is recognized and valued as a full member and vital contributor to LSTC’s mission and identity.

Our seminary has a long history of interfaith commitment stretching back to its six predecessor schools. In 1993, Dr. William Lesher, fourth president of LSTC, was instrumental in reviving the Parliament of the World’s Religions. Today, our ongoing work in this area is demonstrated in a variety of forms that invite your consideration and involvement.
Our Center of Christian–Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, which has just completed a year of intensive self-study to plan for its future, and recently appointed Sara Trumm to serve as its new director.

The biennial travel seminar to India, led this year by Dr. Peter Vethanayagamony and Dr. Mark Swanson, which has as one of its primary emphases an in-depth examination of Christian life, witness, and ministry in a multi-faith context.

Our annual commemoration of Kristallnacht in a multi-faith worship service planned and led by LSTC students, staff, and faculty, and conducted in partnership with KAM Isaiah Israel, residents of Montgomery Place, and other Jewish communities.

A gracious and honest engagement with other faiths is fundamental to our school's mission because it shows the promise of lasting life in Christ that draws us toward all our neighbors in love. How can we incorporate this more deeply across the entire curriculum? What formative practices in this area might enrich the preparation for all forms of ministry?

We hope this report helped to highlight these two actions at the Churchwide Assembly. Please follow the links to relevant documents, ponder the questions we posed, and consider our how our school might become more involved in each area. Many thanks to Klaus–Peter Adam, Scott Chalmers, Matt James, and Mark Swanson for help with the content.

The next installment of these reports will appear on September 13, focusing on the People of African Descent declaration and the Authentic Diversity strategy.

Respectfully,

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