

Conference of Bishops (COB) Overview
by Bishop Ray Tiemann
March, 2015

I have done some slight editing to this document to shorten it a bit and remove unnecessary portions. Thanks to Bp Ray Tiemann for his good work. Hopefully this will give you an overview of the work the CoB moves through when it meets. Bishop John Macholz

Wednesday, March 4

From 2-6 p.m. the Synodical - Churchwide Relations Committee met. The committee is composed of one bishop from each region and some churchwide staff. We heard reports from Wyvetta Bullock, Executive for Administration; Jodi Slattery, Assistant to the Bishop for Governance; Margaret Payne, Director for Mission Support; and Walter May, Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Relations.

Christina Jackson-Skelton, Director of the Mission Advancement unit, gave a detailed report on a variety of ministries within the unit: 1) we achieved the \$48M budget goal for 2014, but total giving was down from 2013 so we continue to grow our stewardship; 2) Young Adults in Global Mission have 61 participants in 2014 and there are plans to grow the program to 100 YAGMs annually; 3) we hope to achieve the \$15M goal for the Malaria Campaign this year and hope to have a short video ready for synod assemblies; 4) World Hunger exceeded the budget goal of \$19M and the emphasis for the ELCA Campaign in 2016 will be to focus and support World Hunger; 5) Fund for Leaders provided 241 scholarships totaling \$1.45M and has an endowment of almost \$46M; 6) 20 new ministries were approved to start and there are 372 new ministries under development, with 56% being in multicultural communities and 24% in situations of working class and poverty situations.

Jodi Slattery gave her report on the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to be held in New Orleans on August 8-13. There will also be a "Grace Gathering" from August 10-13 which is open to anyone who wants to attend. They will join the churchwide voting members for some activities, but will have a program to experience personal renewal of faith, become more deeply engaged in ELCA ministries, and be equipped for observances of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

Walter May reported that there are only three bishop elections this year. Two that are retiring are Leonard Bolick, North Carolina Synod, and Ralph Dunkin, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod. The other election is in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod where Bishop Jon Anderson is currently serving.

Thursday, March 5

Committees of the COB met during the afternoon: Academy, Bishop Formation, Roster, Theological and Ethical Concerns, Ministry Among People in Poverty, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, CSM: Leadership, CSM: New/Renewing Congregations, and Companion Synod Liaison.

At 4:15 p.m. we gathered for worship in the Lutheran Center Chapel with Bishop Tracie Bartholomew, New Jersey Synod, preaching, and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, presiding. After worship, we left for the Eaglewood Resort in Itasca. After dinner together we met for fellowship before retiring for the evening.

Also, during this day and evening, many of the regions met to assign seminary candidates to synods. Pr. Herb Palmer, Region 4 Coordinator; Bp. Brian Maas, Nebraska Synod; Bp. Michael Girlinghouse, AROK Synod; and Bp. Roger Gustafson, Central States Synod, attended for Region 4. There were 263 vacancies for First Call candidates across this church and 152 candidates available.

Friday, March 6

After breakfast, we met for Morning Prayer at 8:30. Bishop Claire Burkat was to be chaplain for the day, but travel difficulties had Bishop Bob Rimbo, Metro New York Synod, change with her as he was to be chaplain on March 10, the commemoration of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. We sang Gospel songs together and had a Thanksgiving for Women of Faith.

We began with the Report of the Secretary. Secretary Chris Boerger introduced Tom Cunniff, the new Associate General Counsel.

He gave a quick report on the 2016 Churchwide Assembly. There will be the election of the ELCA Vice President. Also, voting members should be forewarned that there will be a large amount of constitutional amendments that year in relation to a proposal for a combined Word and Service Roster. A few highlights of the proposed changes:

1. We would not use the entrance rite to describe those on a roster. So we would change “ordained ministers” to “ministers of Word and Sacrament.”
2. We would use “ministers of Word and Service” to designate the new combined roster.
3. We would avoid using a name of the entrance rite for the new roster in places that refer to the rite until a recommendation is made by the group looking at this.
4. We would use the same format for the ministers of Word and Service provisions as we use for the ministers of Word and Sacrament.
5. We would call ministers of Word and Sacrament “pastors” in bylaws and continuing resolutions when appropriate.
6. We would call ministers of Word and Service “deacons” in bylaws and continuing resolutions when appropriate.

There will also be a parallel gathering that will be taking place at the same time in New Orleans. The idea of the “Grace Gathering” held August 10-13 came from a desire to share the experience of the Churchwide Assembly with a larger constituency of ELCA members, a hope that it could serve as a network of ideas and activities in anticipation of the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and an opportunity to participate with assembly voting members in projects of service and learning. For updated information, go to www.ELCA500.org.

Along with information on Roster Issues and Risk Management, Secretary Boerger asked bishops to remind congregations to annually file the appropriate corporate paperwork with their state. This varies from state to state, but there is usually some form of annually reporting that the corporation does still exist. Failure to do this may terminate their incorporation and have legal ramifications.

In checking Texas law, go to <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/corp/forms/boc/boc-np-2010.pdf> The Secretary of State is authorized “to require a nonprofit corporation to file a report that provides information regarding the corporation’s registered agent and registered office, and the names and addresses of its current officers and directors. The report is not requested on an annual basis; the report may be requested by the Secretary of State not more than once every four (4) years. (Sec. 22.357 BOC) A nonprofit corporation that fails to file the periodic report within 30 days from the date that the report is sent by the Secretary of State forfeits its right to transact business in Texas. A nonprofit corporation that has forfeited its right to transact business cannot maintain any action, suit, or proceeding in any Texas court; however, the corporation may still defend any action or suit. The forfeiture does not impair the validity of any contract. The corporation may relieve itself of the forfeiture by simply filing the periodic report within 120 days of the date of mailing of the notice of forfeiture. If the corporation fails to file the report within this 120-day period, the Secretary of State will involuntarily terminate the existence of the Texas nonprofit corporation or revoke the foreign nonprofit corporation’s registration to transact business in Texas, as applicable.”

The 2015 goals for the ELCA Secretary are:

1. To prepare for and work with the Legal and Constitutional Review committee on the amendments to the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions for presentation to the 2016 Assembly.
2. To work with the staffs of the Office of the Secretary and the Mission Advancement Units to make greater use of the ECIS system. This would include encouragement to work with MA staff so that more synods are accessing this database directly. This step would improve the accuracy and the consistency of the data for the leaders of this church.
3. To work with the OS staff to explore the digitization of the records currently maintained on paper. The hope is to develop a format to digitize the files that both OS and the synods maintain. The ultimate goal is to electronically share these files rather than mailing them back and forth.
4. Begin the work with churchwide colleagues to look at the issues connected to moving the yearbook from printed to electronic format. Discussions with Augsburg Fortress have suggested that 2017 could be the last printed yearbook. There is need to identify the issues that moving to an online or electronic yearbook in 2018 would create and begin addressing them.

Marcia Johnson, Synodical Relations, gave an update on the Mobility Call Process. Moving from Formatta to pdf documents has generally gone smoothly. Synodical call process administrators have been wonderful colleagues in “tweaking the system” to make it better.

After a break, Bishop William Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, gave a report on the Word and Service Roster. This conversation was held in a “closed, off the record” session. Open conversation will happen later in the agenda.

Over lunch, CSM and GM met with bishops who are along the border with Mexico and/or have Companion Synods in Central America. We heard of the recent trips that have been made in Central American countries, particularly those where women and children have been deported. The violence and fear they return to is extreme. We discussed ways to address immigration issues so that safe asylum might be provided and such returns less frequent.

After lunch and a siesta/renewal time, we began again at 2 pm. We heard the report of Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. Along with her written report, she gave an update on conversations between the ELCA and the Ethiopian Mekane Jesus Church as assisted by the Lutheran World Federation.

She also shared that she and Bishop Susan Johnson, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, received an invitation from Bishop Bradowsky of the North American Lutheran Church for conversation about how the three church bodies may work together. She will keep us informed of the conversation.

She announced that plans are underway for an all ELCA Rostered Leader Gathering in 2017. A small group is working on location, dates, and program.

Two new staff people will be joining the ELCA staff. Dr. Kathryn Johnson will serve as Director for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations starting September 1, 2015, replacing the Rev. Don McCoid who has served so well for so long.

Also, Mary Ann Schwabe, Associate in Ministry, joins the staff as Natural Systems Coordinator. She will serve as a resource to bishops and synods as they promote the well-being of rostered leaders and congregations, lead seminars and presentations on systems theory, and provide a regular presence in the churchwide office to serve as a resource and support for our work together.

Bishop Julian Gordy, Southeastern Synod, gave a report on the Mission Support Think Tank. After small group conversations around tables, bishops shared reflections on the report to send to the Church Council. In particular, it was helpful to have conversation on some new opportunities before us:

- 1) “Rethinking stewardship” remains a topic for imaginative conversation among North American Christians. One of the fruits of this movement has been a broadening of our understanding of financial stewardship to embrace, alongside traditional understandings of

proportionate giving, 21st century approaches to fund-raising that take seriously the changing profile of 21st century givers. A good example of this is the ELCA's current venture into "Peer to Peer" (P2P) giving opportunities on behalf of ELCA Hunger and other churchwide ministries.

2) Younger generations of givers are often more engaged with causes and ministries that matter to them. They tend not to bifurcate their service and their giving. This church needs to recognize and embrace the fact that, for many givers nowadays, interest in designated giving reflects much more than a selfish desire to "attach strings" to one's giving.

3) The Think Tank is impressed with new directions being pursued by the ELCA Mission Advancement unit to engage congregations and members more fully, to recognize the importance of members who are able to give major gifts, to "steward" more effectively relationships with givers, to improve mission interpretation efforts, and to grow networks across this church for the sake of increasing financial support.

4) The Think Tank also is cheered by the renewed efforts of the ELCA Foundation to expand the cadre of regional gift planners, enhance its tools and resources, and foster goal-setting and greater accountability among its staff. The Think Tank believes that planned giving needs to occupy a more visible, central place in the ELCA overall mission funding strategy. Within this strategy the Think Tank encourages exploration of endowments playing a larger role in providing reliable income streams to pay for our infrastructures in the congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.

After a break, we heard the report of the Vice President, Carlos Peña. As usual, he has been traveling to the TLU Corporation Meeting; attending the National Leadership Team meeting for the ELCA Malaria Campaign; preparing for the ELCA Church Council meeting in April; and making arrangements to serve as the ELCA representative at the Metropolitan Washington DC and Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assemblies.

We had Process Observations (Bishops Leonard Bolick, Ralph Dunkin, and Patricia Lull), which reflect on how we function as the COB. They offered positive comments and identified areas for improved communication.

Before we recessed for dinner, Bishops' announcements (items of a general nature for all) and Bishops' concerns (confidential for COB members only) were shared.

During dinner, those of us who are new bishops met with their mentors for conversations regarding leading their first synod assembly. Afterwards, we met for fellowship and farewells to Leonard Bolick, North Carolina Synod, and Ralph Dunkin, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod.

Saturday, March 7

Morning Prayer was led by Bishop James Hazelwood, New England Synod.

A group gave their Reflections on their Ecumenical Journey. Reporting were Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton; Bishop Donald Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod; Bishop Patricia Lull, Saint Paul Area Synod; Don McCoid, former Executive of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; and Kathryn Lohre, Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations.

The journey began in London with a tour of Westminster Abbey, tea with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and evening prayer at Lambeth Palace. The archbishop shared that the Anglican Communion is centering its ministry on Renewal of prayer and the religious life, Reconciliation, Evangelism, and Witness. They also met with heads of many social agencies, staff of the Church of England, and attended Vespers at Westminster Abbey.

They then traveled to Geneva and visited with the Lutheran World Federation. Meetings were held with General Secretary Martin Junge and staff. They discussed the world observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017, with three emphases – salvation not for sale, people not for sale, creation not for sale. There was encouragement to use the book, “From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.” They also met with the World Council of Churches, which is based in Geneva.

The next stop was Rome. They met with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and visited St. Peter’s Basilica, the Catacombs, and the Ecumenical Basilica St. Bartholomew. Evening prayer was in Santa Maria in Trastevere. They also had a general audience with Pope Francis and met with the Secretary of State. Conversation was also held with the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

Thanks to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 1999, conversations have continued and led to the creation of a new affirmation entitled “Declaration (in Via) on the Way.” Hoping to be completed in the fall, it is written by a team determined by the Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA. Watch for this document later this year.

Bishop Donald Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod, and Heidi Hagstrom, Congregational and Synodical Mission, gave an update on the 2016 Youth Gathering. 27,713 are already registered. It is about adolescent faith formation, filled with lots of learning opportunities – racial justice, theology of the cross, etc. These materials are already being used by congregational groups in preparation for the event.

The opening event will be in Ford Field, followed by a three-day rotation of 1/3 of the attendees (service, community, synod group). The themes for the five days are: Rise Up Together, Bear Burdens, Build Bridges, Break Chains, and Bring Hope.

After a break, Bishop Herman Yoos, South Carolina Synod and Bishop James Hazelwood, New England Synod, gave a report on the Theological Education Advisory Council (TEAC). Baker-Tilley is the consulting group that has been looking at the financial stresses on the system, and they will be making visits to all eight seminaries and come back with three models of reimagining theological education. All seminary board chairs have agreed to this process.

Don McCoid, former Executive of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, gave an update on the Ecclesiology of the Global Church Report. The November, 2012, Church Council received a request from the Conference of Bishops to create a task force to review the governing documents of this church, including but not limited to Chapter 3 of the ELCA constitution, for the purpose of addressing how this church can affirm and strengthen its self-understanding as part of the Lutheran World Federation. Their final report will recommend constitutional changes to chapter 3 (Nature of the Church) and chapter 8 (Relationships) in order to echo the constitution of the Lutheran World Federation and reflect this church's deep commitment to the treasured relationships that exist with the other member churches of the LWF.

The Conference broke for lunch and a time for Siesta/Renewal. We reconvened at 2 pm to hear a report from Pastor Linda Norman, ELCA Treasurer.

The churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had total operating revenue and support of \$71.5 million for the twelve-month period ended January 31, 2015, \$1.1 million greater than expenses of \$70.3 million.

Income from congregations through synods in the form of Mission Support income for the twelve months was \$48.4 million, favorable to the revised budget by \$0.4 million although representing a decrease of \$0.3 million or less than 1.0 percent compared to last year.

Total contributions to ELCA World Hunger for the twelve months were \$19.3 million, favorable to the budget by \$0.3 million and prior year by \$0.6 million.

The ELCA Malaria Campaign received gifts of \$2.8 million in the twelve months ending January 31, 2015, and has raised \$13.8 million campaign-to-date.

ELCA members and partners contributed \$6.1 million for Lutheran Disaster Response in the twelve-month period, primarily in support of general undesignated programs and ongoing recovery efforts from Hurricane Sandy.

“Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA” has raised \$48.2 million in revenue and commitments to date in its five-year, comprehensive campaign. This amount represents 24.4 percent of the total goal of \$198 million by January 31, 2019. In addition to results reported above, strong response to date has been in the areas of New Congregations, Fund for Leaders, Global Church-International Leaders: Women and Missionaries/Young Adults in Global Mission.

The afternoon was filled with two self-selected workshop sessions on topics of interest, led by COB members and guest presenters. Topics included lay schools, multiple funding streams, Means of Grace document, stewardship, ecclesiology of the global church, call process, Think Tank on mission funding, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, candidate assignment process, and how to be bishop to your rostered spouse.

After dinner together, the evening was free for rest and fellowship and “a good time was had by all.”

Sunday, March 8

The day began with worship with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, preaching, and Bishop Sam Zeiser, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, presiding. The offering was designated for The Campaign for the ELCA, New Ministry Starts, totaling \$2,511.

After the break, the COB held conversation around three items of COB business. The first was around the question, “How does the Conference of Bishops make statements and process language for those statements?” Bishop Jon Anderson, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, led the conversation. A number of statements/pastoral letters have been done in the past, both for COB and public use. As we work to better delineate the process, a former COB document gave guidance for three kinds of statements:

- 1) A “Pastoral Letter” in which the Conference of Bishops offers its counsel and commentary on a major issue before this church;
- 2) A “Sense of the Conference” statement in which the Conference offers its counsel to a special issue before this church;
- 3) A “Response” statement in which another unit or expression of this church asks for the advice and counsel of the Conference on a particular issue.

New Regional Liaison Bishops elected to the Church Council were: Region 2 – Steve Talmage; Region 5 – Mary Froiland; and Region 6 – Suzanne Dillahunt. Terms begin with the Fall, 2015, Church Council meeting.

We also discussed amending the Quadrennial Reorganization of the COB Executive Committee. Currently, every four years all new members of the COB Executive Committee are elected. The amended process, presented by the Executive Committee, proposes elections every four years but 1) to stagger terms for at-large members, 2) to have no term limits, 3) to provide for succession of vice-chair to chair should that position become vacant, 4) to have at-large members be elected from the entire conference rather than from a designated cluster of regions, and 5) to have all terms begin on the first day of the third month following election. The change was unanimously approved.

We heard some COB Committee reports before lunch.

Bp. Steve Talmage gave a report on CSM: Leadership. CSM is currently working on updating the Candidacy Manual. There will be a one-page document that lays out the entire process for ease of understanding. Suggested revisions will be accepted until September 1 to Greg Villalon. There was also conversation on the Word and Service Roster and a discussion on ways to celebrate the 45th and 50th anniversaries of the Ordination of Women.

Bp. Suzanne Dillahunt reported on the Synodical-Churchwide Relations Committee. Details of that report are at the beginning of this document.

Our daily chaplain, Bp. John Macholz, led us in a prayer before lunch. The afternoon and evening were free.

Monday, March 9

Morning Prayer was led by Bishop Wilma Kucharek, Slovak Zion Synod. We sang a Czechoslovakian hymn, ELW 602, "Your Heart, O God, Is Grieved." After devotions, we continued with COB Committee Reports.

Bp. Kurt Kusserow gave a report from Bishop Formation Committee. With two, maybe three, new bishops elected this year, this will be a small group. The Committee has also continued to work on a booklet called "Book of Wisdom" containing advice for new bishops.

Bp. John Roth reported from the Synodical and Rostered Leader Care Committee. This committee helps manage the Good Samaritan Fund, which provides emergency financial assistance to persons on the roster and/or their families. They also manage the Shared Risk Fund, which provides financial protection related to disciplinary action costs.

Bp. Jon Anderson brought a report from the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee. They 1) created the plan for the conversation held yesterday about how the COB makes official statements; 2) discussion how to better connect with the theologians of the church; 3) conversation on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and the Table/Font.

They also looked at the process of ELCA Social Statements and discussed the current proposal on Gender-Based Violence. The COB spent 20 minutes reviewing the proposal, noting positive and negative characteristics, in preparation of a longer look at this document this afternoon.

Bp. Mark Narum brought a report from CSM: New/Renewing Congregations. Significant time was spent on congregational renewals, area strategies, and other synodical grants. Currently, seven synods are in a process of evaluating the DEM position and ways to quantify their work.

Bp. Donald Kreiss reported on the work of the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee. The national Jewish-Christian Roundtable on pastoral issues met last November, and it was very positive. Bishop Eaton, together with staff and our committee, has begun to think about a possible ELCA inter-religious vision statement that would be complimentary to the ecumenism vision statement adopted in 1991.

Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network, or LEIRN, meets annually at the National Workshop on Christian Unity, Charlotte April 20-23. It is not too late to register for this year's NWCU! Part of this year's learning for LEIRN, together with the Catholic network, will be to become familiar with the new study guide for "From Conflict to Communion"

Two formal actions: 1) The ELCA Conference of Bishops encourages the continued development of the "Declaration on the Way" and looks forward to receiving the final text at our fall meeting. 2) The

ELCA Conference of Bishops affirms to the Church Council the final report of the task force on the Ecclesiology of a Global Church.

Bp. William Gafkjen gave the Roster Committee report. Requests for On-Leave-from-Call extensions, three-year waiver requests, and non-stipendiary calls for rostered persons were reviewed by the committee, recommended to the COB, and approved.

Bp. Larry Wohlrabe reported from the Academy Committee. The 2015 Academy to Germany was well received. The 2016 Academy will be January 6-11 at the JW Marriott Resort near Tucson, AZ. The theme will be "The Hard and Blessed Work of Leading in Times of Change." Four bishops will address different areas of leadership challenge prior to Dr. Will Willimon joining us will be the main speaker.

Bp. Wayne Miller gave a brief report on Ministry Among People in Poverty. They learned from Stacy Martin about the recent fact-finding trip to Central America to discover more about the situation leading to the unaccompanied minor issues on the U.S. Border.

Josselyn Bennett reported on the continuing work of CSM to grow and improve the church's response to poverty through annual poverty grants. In addition to immediate assistance, there is growing emphasis on community organizing, community development work, and the formation of faith communities in areas of concentrated poverty. Time was also spent looking in more detail at the response efforts toward poverty in Appalachia.

They continued the conversation about how best to lead a conversation with the whole COB about local and synodical responses to poverty. More planning will continue.

After a break, we discussed the Same Gender Families Report by Bishop Mary Froiland, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, and Bishop John Roth, Central/Southern Illinois Synod. They reviewed the Church Council Mandate, reading the approved resolutions authorizing their work. One item highlighted was to "Foster conversation and sharing of resources throughout this church." The group represents a spectrum of convictions and allows for vulnerability; the group is modeling the difficult conversations. Presenters represent a variety of perspectives, including painful ones.

Three teams meet: Conversations Team, Resources Team, and Communications Team. They will provide a draft on Conversations for the Fall COB.

There is tension about what kind of "care" is needed for same gendered couples/families. The Team has heard from CORE on the one side and Reconciling Works on the other. The question about the kind of resources needed is up in the air as well. The challenge is difficult, with an array of pressures.

Bp. Michael Rinehart gave a report on Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS). He shared "A Lutheran Welcome," an excellent video from LIRS.

There are 200 million migrants in the world today and half of them are Christian. Many want to come to the United States. 68,444 unaccompanied children came across the southern border of the US...LIRS helped 19,000 of these children. LIRS settles more children than any other agency except the Conference of Catholic Bishops.

LIRS is the "Thought Leader" on unaccompanied minors. They convened, last October at Episcopal Retreat Center near Houston, leaders from the ELCA, LCMS, and Central American countries.

On March 27 a group of Catholic bishops and representatives of the ELCA and LIRS will visit the new Dilley, Texas, Detention Center. There will be 2,400 beds in this for-profit facility. Churches and its members need to be involved and visit the Centers. The "First Steps" book is available to guide people who want to help.

Refugee Sunday is in June every year. Workshops are available for congregations and assemblies. Matt Herzberg is the contact at LIRS.

During lunch, Ready Benches met. These are groups of bishops that are available to address various legislative issues. Those meeting today included Middle East, Immigration, International, Domestic, Care of Creation, and Justice is not Just Us.

I attended the Immigration Bench with 10 other bishops, CSM director Steve Bouman, and representatives who joined us by conference call from LIRS and the ELCA Advocacy Office in Washington, D.C. We reviewed what was happening in our various synods, heard about advocacy efforts in Congress, and emphases through LIRS. There was also discussion about creating a continuing program around immigration similar to the “Peace not Walls” emphasis. Several bishops were assigned to work on how this may be organized.

After a time of siesta/renewal, we began again at 2 p.m. with a report from Portico Benefit Services by CEO, Pr. Jeff Thiemann. At the end of January, 2015, the 5-year investment results showed 9.90% positive growth for the 60e Social Balanced Fund. The 2015-17 theme is “Build a Foundation for Growth.” It is a balance between serving members well (based on experience and engagement) and growth (into the institutional market and preparing to offer services to individuals).

Portico is changing their disability vendor from Aetna to Liberty Mutual. This begins on June 1st and affects 325 members receiving these benefits. Synods will receive more information about this.

In the 2015 Open Enrollment period, Gold+ enrollment decreased from 92-89%, Silver+ increased from 4-7%, Platinum+ and Bronze+ remained the same at 1%. There was conversation about the rate increase this year, and Portico did some research on cost comparisons which it shared with the COB.

Pr. Walter May gave his report as the Executive for Synodical Relations. He updated us on the work of his staff and the recent gatherings for synod vice presidents, administrative assistants, and bishop assistants/associates.

He also introduced Pr. Eric Wester, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop and Director, Federal Chaplaincies, who gave his report. Notice the current numbers and how they have decreased over the last 5 years.

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| Total military chaplains: | 152 | (52 Active Duty and 100 Reserve and Guard) |
| Veterans Affairs chaplains: | 30 | (13 Full-time and 17 Part-time) |
| Bureau of Prison chaplains: | 3 | (All full-time) |
| Chaplain candidates: | 18 | (Seminary students or graduates awaiting call) |

| | <u>2010</u> | <u>2015</u> | <u>Pending New Applicants</u> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Total Military chaplains: | 198 | 152 | 21 |
| Veterans Affairs chaplains: | 531 | 30 | 24 |
| Bureau of Prison chaplains: | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Chaplain candidates: | 24 | 18 | 5 |

The COB resumed their conversation on the proposed social statement on Gender Based Violence. There were concerns about accessibility to all ages/groups, the timeline for its release, and its length. Issues of content were addressed at various points.

After a break, we heard an update from Jeff Barrow on the Women and Justice Task Force. The message is looking for a sense of urgency. The TF has met seven times and has grown in diversity. Various presenters have been included on Economics, Masculinity, God language, Process Builders. They reviewed the ELCA Social Statements to see what we have said about justice for women along the way. How do we get our statements into the hands of people with whom it can make a difference? The Team is moving into the writing phase.

We then heard an update on Communion Practices by Pr. Kevin Strickland, ELCA Director for Worship. We received a report on responses from congregations and individuals. Pastors don't want to vote on Communion and leaders don't want this to be church dividing (open table vs. closed table). There is appreciation for the invitation to look at the Use of the Means of Grace. We heard from bishops that there have been rich conversations across the ELCA where this has been engaged.

Theology and practice around the place of the font and table in the community seems to lack uniformity. The idea of the Bishops offering a pastoral letter on this issue gained some traction and interest.

Worship Jubilee is to be held July 19-23 in Atlanta. The theme is "Called to Be a Living Voice." For info, see <http://elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Worship/Worship-Jubilee>

Next, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Secretary Chris Boerger, Bishop Murray Finck reported on their Trip to the Middle East. The trip took place shortly after the Bishops' Academy trip to Germany.

Bishop Eaton's Overview: The purpose of the trip was to be introduced to the partner leaders in the Middle East, including the ELCJHL, LWF. Time was spent in relationship building, meetings with the Latin, Greek and Armenian Patriarchs, representatives of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and visiting schools. The team met with government leaders and was able to advocate on issues. Bishop Eaton spoke affectionately of the great work the schools are doing and the scope of their care for diverse communities.

Secretary Chris Boerger reported on the visit to the Augusta Victoria Hospital, whose mission is focused on oncology and cardiology. The issue of payments from the Palestinian Authority (directed from USAID) was discussed. Advocacy efforts have been actively engaged in asking our government to direct USAID funds directly to Augusta Victoria Hospital, as opposed to those funds going first to the PA to be forwarded. Augusta Victoria has been recognized as having the highest health care sophistication in Israel and the Middle East. We were encouraged to have Congress issue a Congressional Letter of Authorization to USAID for release of funds to be given to Augusta Victoria Hospital.

Bishop Murray Finck spoke of the Elder Care Unit to be built on LWF land by Augusta Victoria Hospital. He also reported on the trip to Jordan, to the baptismal site of Jesus. The new sanctuary, built on the Jordan side of the baptismal site, is now completed. An ELCA group helped break ground for it during their 2009 trip.

He also spoke of the Cremisan Valley settlement that is being built on the last green land in the Bethlehem area. There is a Catholic convent, church, and school in the valley, and they own many vineyards and a winery. In April 2013 Israeli courts approved land appropriation for the construction of the Security Barrier. The new wall cuts off the ability for many people to connect with their land. Jewish settlements continue to be built and will eventually connect two longer-standing settlements already existing on hill tops. Olive trees and centuries old olive vineyards are slowly dying.

The team spent a day in Galilee and Sunday at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jerusalem, where Bishop Eaton preached.

Bishop Eaton noted that the ELCA has given \$3.9 million in grants to various locations in the Middle East, including Syria, Gaza, and Iraq water projects. The LWF runs the refugee camps in the area. Her take-away from the trip continues to be the immense struggle of centuries of family systems that are involved, which are intensely complex. Bishop Munib Younan (ELCJHL) guides our thinking in the area...we cannot fix them...patience is his plea.

Mark Brown, the Director of Augusta Victoria Hospital for the LWF, expressed appreciation for all of our efforts for AVH and the Mount of Olives property.

After process observations and Bishops' announcements and concerns, the COB recessed for Regional Dinners.

Tuesday, March 10

Morning Prayer was led by Bishop Claire Burkat, Southeast Pennsylvania Synod.

We heard an introduction and opportunities with ELCA Constituent Information System (ECIS). It is a unified system of information by both the churchwide office and synods. It provides a single source of data, allows for customized data lists, and builds stronger relationships through detailed information. For information, contact [constituent.care @elca.org](mailto:constituent.care@elca.org).

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton gave an update on the ELCA's efforts on the observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. ELCA staff Marcus Kunz and Amanda Lauer are working on domestic celebrations and with the LWF. Each synod will be able to create its own particular emphasis of the observance. For more information, go to www.elca500.org.

There was conversation about the Word and Service Roster proposal and how the COB could provide advice on this process to the ELCA Church Council. The COB debated whether:

- 1) to move forward with the proposal to create a unified roster along with a proposal for an entrance rite;
- 2) to delay both actions to create a unified roster and make a decision on an entrance rite;
- 3) to move forward on proposing a unified roster but delay a decision on an entrance rite.

The COB approved the following motion: "The Conference of Bishops supports moving forward the work of unifying the Word and Service Rosters at the 2016 churchwide assembly while at the same time asking that a decision on the appropriate entrance rite and related issues be delayed to a future date."

After prayers for outgoing Bishops Leonard Bolick and Ralph Dunkin and for Bishop Jon Anderson in an upcoming bishop's election, the COB adjourned and returned to their home synods.