

## **2013 Report On Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations in the GMS**

Increasingly, for reasons placed upon us by our times, the ecumenical work of the past 100 years (the goal of which is Christian unity in all things) has been combined with interfaith work in recent time (the goal of which is mutual understanding between persons of diverse religious perspectives and meaningful cooperation in civic and humanitarian concerns). The Greater Milwaukee Synod brings a Lutheran voice to both these areas of commitment through its involvement in the Wisconsin Council of Churches, the Milwaukee Area Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic Commission, and the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee. The budgetary commitments of the Synod are crucial to the ongoing work of these organizations, and I thank the Assembly for its continued support of these programs.

The Wisconsin Council of Church ([www.wichurches.org](http://www.wichurches.org)) remains an indispensable partner in the Greater Milwaukee Synod's work of ecumenism and interreligious relations. Through the WiCC we have this past year (June 2012 - May 2013) been involved in various regional and state wide initiatives, including: (1) sending a book to prison program; (2) participating in the Season of Civility program; (3) sponsoring advocacy, study documents and awareness resources (for free) on issues such as concealed carry, poverty and hunger, torture, health care, etc.; (4) expanding the ecumenical table by the receiving of historic black Churches (Christian Methodist Episcopal Church) and Mennonite Churches into the Council; (5) assisting Full Communion Churches (including us in the ELCA) in educating the public on and implementing our Full Communion Agreements; and (6) sponsoring numerous educational forums (such as the Washington Island Forum, the Winter Forum, and the Annual Meeting) on such timely topics as "The Emerging Church," "Preaching and Teaching the Texts of Advent and Christmas," the "Healthy Boundaries" workshops, and many more. At the December 2012 Annual Meeting, hearing Parker Palmer on "Healing the Heart of Democracy" was a rare and inspiring opportunity. Thanks to our partnership with the WiCC our voice and our values receive a significantly larger hearing.

The Milwaukee Area Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic Commission, as established through the LARC Covenant, focused this year on what might be called "spiritual ecumenism." The major event included three workshops on various forms of prayer presented by Catholic (Lectio Divina), Anglican (The Hours) and Orthodox (praying with icons) representatives, presentations by the three bishops on how ecumenism has impacted their spirituality, followed by a Sunday evening meal, culminating in an ecumenical Tazai-styled prayer service. The event was inspired by the LARC Commission and bishops' growing awareness that the younger generations are more hungry for spirituality than organization. In response, the LARC Covenanting Churches believe that an ecumenical spirituality has a vital role to play in Christian outreach today. Concerning the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, both Bishop Barrow and Sue Lindberg continue to represent the Synod on the Cabinet and keep us meaningfully

involved in interfaith relations. Thanks to our involvement in the work of the Interfaith Conference we were able to participate in an interfaith show of support to the Sikh Community after the tragic shootings of August 5, 2012.

By observing announcements through the Listserv and through personal contact, I am aware that both ecumenical and interfaith involvement is an important part of the activity of many congregations in our synod. With regard to Interfaith awareness, the Random Lake Area Ecumenical Association (in which St. Paul's Lutheran plays a leading role) sponsored a series called "Getting to Know Our Neighbors," where representatives Native American Community, the Baha'I Faith, and the Sikh Tradition presented on the fundamentals and basics of their religious traditions. With regard basic ecumenical cooperation in the areas of learning and service, St. Peter's ELC in Sheboygan sent me a long list of activities they are involved in: ranging from ecumenically supported Vacation Bible School to jointly led ecumenical worship services, from cooperatively staffed ecumenical food programs to celebrating new developments in their respective churches, like new building dedications and installations of new pastors in the community.

As your congregation continues its ecumenical and interfaith work, I would like to hear from you so that I might lift them up as examples of how ecumenical and interfaith work is not simply an addendum to business as usual, but of the essence of what we do.

Respectfully,  
Rev. Dr. Steven C. Kuhl  
Ecumenical Representative of GMS