

## Joint report from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) visit to The Church of Norway (CoN), May 2023

### Introduction

By invitation from Presiding Bishop Olav Fykse Tveit, together with Moderator of Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Rev. Kristine Sandmæl, a delegation from ELCA visited CoN mid-May: The Rev Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding bishop of ELCA; Kathryn Lohre, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop and Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment; and Rev. Rachel Eskesen, Desk Director for Europe at ELCA. As two churches journey together in the communion of the Lutheran World Federation, it was a learning week for both, with deepening of our fellowship and understanding of each other's contexts. In this brief report we will focus on the short/long-term follow-up, more than details on the visit itself.

### Goals for the visit

In preparation for this church-to-church visit, we developed together these primary goals:

- To grow in fellowship as two churches of the Lutheran World Federation by:
  - worshipping and praying together
  - building relationships
  - sharing cross-contextually
  - exploring common issues and challenges as well as differences
  - exploring historic roots/relations AND new common themes towards 2030
  - preparing for the LWF Assembly in Poland
- For each church to:
  - Experience the life of their sister church
  - Meet and grow in fellowship with church leaders and staff counterparts
  - Learn about the opportunities and challenges facing their sister church
  - Consider certain models, projects, or methods that could be replicated
  - Identify ways in which our partnership can be strengthened
  - Enjoy the beauty of the Norwegian people and their culture, and God's creation



The themes that will be the focus of this visit will include:

- The life of the church in a time of the waning pandemic, rising populism, and polarization.
- The church's witness, especially with regard to climate, gender, and racial justice.
- The church's responsibility to seek truth and healing with Indigenous people.

Both churches affirm that all of these goals and themes were met and/or exceeded during the course of the visit.



## Overview of the visit

### Oslo/Head Office CoN (May 16-17)

- Morning prayer/Holy Communion at the [Church of Norway](#) Head Office chapel, with devotions on the LWF Assembly theme, “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope,” by Presiding Bishop Eaton
- Meetings with CoN staff and leadership, including discussions on polarizations and populism in both contexts, and an overview of the Truth and Reconciliation process in Norway today
- Meetings and exhibition at the [Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies](#)
- Reception hosted by Presiding Bishop Olav and Oslo Bishop Kari Veiteberg with vespers
- Presiding Bishop Eaton audience with His Majesty Crown Prince Haakon (Eaton only)
- Meetings with leaders of the [Christian Council of Norway](#) and [Council on Religions and Life Stance Communities](#) (Lohre & Eskesen only)
- Meeting with [Norwegian Church Aid](#) (and ELCA/LWF staff in New York online), including discussions on *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, on Norwegianization of the Sami and other minorities*, Dagfinn Høybråten NCA Secretary General and Chair of the TRC
- Constitution Day (17<sup>th</sup> of May) Parade with greetings from Presiding Bishop Eaton in Oslo Cathedral; visit to the 22th July Memorial; and interview with Bishop Kari Veiteberg published by “[Vårt Land](#).”

### Trondheim (May 17-19)

- Sermon by Presiding Bishop Eaton in Nidaros Cathedral
- Lunch with the Mayor of Trondheim
- Visit to [Tautra Monastery](#), conversation and evensong
- Verdalsoratoriet Concert and guided tour of [Nidaros Cathedral](#)
- Pilgrimage/City Walking with Pilgrimage-Pastor Einar Vegge
- Meetings/meals with various leaders, including the Catholic Bishop of Trondheim, Erik Varden



### Hamar (May 20)

- Journey through God’s beautiful creation on train ride from Trondheim to Hamar
- Program in memory of Bishop Emerita Rosemarie Køhn at Hamar Cathedral; greeting by Presiding Bishop Eaton; unveiling of statue in memory and celebratory reception

### Oslo (May 21)

- Presiding Bishop Eaton sermon during worship at the [American Lutheran Congregation](#)



## Brief reflections

This church-to-church visit was a journey of mutual enrichment, joyful connection, and growth in faith and love through Christ Jesus. During rich and full days together, we learned about each other, identifying how our contexts are both similar and different. This will enable both churches to work together in more meaningful ways, and through the Lutheran World Federation.

While the historic ties between the Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (and its predecessor bodies) have created a longstanding connection between the two churches, that narrative tends to face to the past, filled with nostalgia and the longing of generations past. By contrast, this visit focused on sharing the contemporary life of the churches – with the discovery of common joys and challenges that connect us in new, forward-facing ways.

We were struck by how many priorities we share in our work and witness as churches today, despite the differences in our contexts and histories, including:

- becoming churches that reflect the rich diversity of our communities and contexts;
- countering populism, polarization, nationalism, extremism, and racism, and wrestling with our histories – both our joys and mistakes – as we discern God’s future for us;
- promoting Indigenous justice, healing, and truth-telling about the church’s complicity in the erasure of Indigenous peoples and cultures, and learning from sister churches who have engaged in this vital work;
- addressing the existential climate crisis as a faithful response to our vocation as stewards of God’s creation, including adapting the way we work;
- deepening our ecumenical and inter-religious relations as an integral part of our life together as the body of Christ and with others made in God’s image, and engaging such partnerships to reach shared goals of the common good, justice, and peace;
- extending welcome to migrants, refugees, and immigrants as Christ first welcomed us;
- and many more...

As we shared in these discoveries, we were able to offer each other resources, best practices, and fresh insights. By learning more deeply about each other, we have also come to a deeper knowledge of ourselves. This, by God’s grace, is the sacred gift of pilgrimage.

## Gratitude & Invitation

The ELCA would like to offer a special word of thanks for the tremendous hospitality and generosity of our host, the Church of Norway. We are deeply indebted to Bishop Olav Fykse Tveit and the Rev. Kristine Sandmael, who together with several bishops, pastors, staff people, and others, enriched our journey with their time, treasure, and wisdom. Rev. Tjelle provided exceptional staff support.



At the conclusion of the visit, Presiding Bishop Eaton indicated that she will extend an invitation to Preses Tveit to attend the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly for a reciprocal visit. This will also be an occasion to meet the newly-elected Presiding Bishop of the ELCA for continued relationship-building. We look forward to hosting you as a continuation of our journey together.

## Follow Up

### Preparations for the LWF Assembly in Poland, September 2023:

- The two churches will continue to be in communication (before, during, and after the Assembly) regarding certain aspects of the Assembly, especially the election of a new president, the need for sensitivity and deliberations on themes such as gender/LGBTQ and Israel/Palestine/ELCJHL.
- There will be cooperation between ELCA, CoN and others on caste-based discrimination/Dalit justice through workshops (Tjelle and Martin).
- There will be cooperation between ELCA and Norwegian Church Aid/CoN on the issue of “tax justice mobilization,” in response to a follow up invitation from NCA. This theme is interesting but requires careful framing from ELCA due to the sensitive political/polarized landscape.
- There will be cooperation to uplift the LWF’s Gender Justice Policy and to support the commitment to the ordination of women through accompaniment, advocacy, and education before, during and after the Assembly.
- There will be consideration of how to cooperate on our shared commitment to Indigenous justice, healing, and decolonization in our churches and society at the Assembly and beyond.

### The church’s responsibility to seek truth and healing with Indigenous people:

- The [Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Report](#) was released 1 June, including a summary in English; the full version will be shared with the ELCA when it is translated.
- The Sami researcher Dr Tore Johnsen contributed with Indigenous perspectives to the Study Guide for LWF, and also recently published his doctoral dissertation: “[Sámi Nature-Centered Christianity in the European Arctic.](#)”
- The CoN is invited to participate in the ELCA’s [Truth & Healing Movement](#), see also:
  - [Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#)
  - [Declaration to American Indian Alaska Native.pdf \(elca.org\)](#)

### The life of the church in the time of a waning pandemic, rising populism, and polarization:

- The two churches will share with one another our respective positions on the unfolding situation in Russia/Ukraine and support the WCC efforts for dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church.
- The two churches will continue to learn about the similarities and differences in our contexts:
  - [Populisme og kristendom av Kristin Graff-Kallevåg | Cappelen Damm](#)
  - [Christians Against Christian Nationalism: US coalition and resources](#)
  - [Public Health - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#): Covid-19 resources

**To grow in fellowship as two churches of the Lutheran World Federation by:**

- The two churches will continue to explore historic roots/relations and new common themes:
  - CoN is planning a 2025 focus on Immigration/National Jubilee 2030 related to the [Bicentennial Commemoration of Norwegian Emigration to North America](#)
  - ELCA has launched a [Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church](#) which will bring finding and recommendations for action to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly regarding the purpose and organizational structures of the church, with in light of our commitment to dismantling racism.

**Ecumenical/Interfaith:**

- The two churches will inform each other of ecumenical and inter-religious developments and share resources, such as:
  - [ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations](#)
  - [Jewish Relations - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#)
  - [Declaration Of The ELCA To The Jewish Community.pdf](#)
  - [Inter-Religious Policy Statement REVISED\\_0919\\_v2.indd \(elca.org\)](#)
  - [A Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community.pdf](#)
  - [Guidelines for Ministry in Multi Religious World.pdf \(elca.org\)](#)



**The church's witness, especially with regard to climate, gender, and racial justice**

- Resources, information and opportunities for partnership will be shared and explored, including:
  - Climate Justice
    - CoN Bishops Conference message, "[God's Creation – Our Home](#)"
    - CoN involvement in a US-based ecumenical journey on "[Songs and Care for Creation](#)," A New Heaven and A New Earth", with ties also to the Vatican and the Episcopal Church.
    - ELCA social message, "[Caring for Creation](#)"
    - ELCA Climate Justice work and resources online [online](#).
  - Gender Justice
    - ELCA Social Statement, "[Faith, Sexism, and Justice](#)"
    - ELCA Social Message, "[Gender-based Violence](#)"
    - ELCA Gender Justice work and resources [online](#).
  - Racial Justice
    - [ELCA Racial Justice Ministries](#)
    - [ELCA Slavery Apology Explanation](#)
    - [In/ Visible - Everyday Racism in Norway](#)
  - Broader Advocacy/UN
    - [ELCA Advocacy](#) (DC)
    - ELCA at the UN, [Lutheran Office for World Community](#)
    - CoN: [www.sdgbook.com](#) on SDGs and Christian Faith







There is one body and one spirit,  
just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.  
Ephesians 4:4

**Chicago/Oslo, 1 August 2023**

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