

Preparing for the Reformation Commemoration: Conversation Groups

Last fall, Bishop Jim Hazelwood and Cardinal Sean O'Malley announced preparations for a mutual observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This participates in the worldwide observance, to be initiated October 31, 2016 by Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation. Locally, along with worship and service projects, Cardinal Sean and Bishop Jim encouraged us to participate in ecumenical discussion groups, saying:

...We seek to witness together to the world. One aspect of this witness is in caring for God's good creation. Pope Francis' encyclical On Care for Our Common Home provides a timely opportunity for Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and all our ecumenical partners to gather in small groups to read and discuss it together in an atmosphere of prayer and common faith. We encourage all to do so. Such a time of study, prayer, and ecumenical fellowship will serve as a worthy preparation for our mutual observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Over the next year and a half, the commemoration planning team would like to encourage and support congregations in forming such groups not only in the Boston Archdiocese but all across New England. Some congregations, such as St. John Lutheran in Sudbury, MA, have already studied the Pope's encyclical. Others are beginning to plan for next year's programs and may choose a different document to study. Whatever approach is chosen, these discussion groups can be a starting point for joint activities including shared acts of service and, in the fall of 2017, a culminating worship experience.

If you would like to join the conversation, here are some ways to get started:

- Contact leaders of nearby congregations, share the bishops' letter, and invite them to co-lead a study group with you.
- Choose the location. Will one congregation host? Or is there a public setting available, such as a coffee shop, library or pub? Perhaps a non-church setting will make the group feel more balanced and welcoming even to people not from our congregations.
- Set dates. Joint study such as this could make for a wonderful Lenten activity for 2017!
- Select a text to read together. Suggested options include:
 - [*On Care for our Common Home*](#). Pope Francis' encyclical will certainly be an engaging option with which Christians of all kinds will find common ground.
 - [*The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification \(JDDJ\)*](#). This document from 1999 presents a shared consensus between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the central issue of the reformation.
 - [*From Conflict to Communion*](#). This book explores the themes and history of the reformation and explores the work of recent decades in reconciling our two churches.

(All three resources are available for free online and for purchase at Amazon.com and other retailers. Additional resources are listed below.)

- Invite and advertise! Depending on your setting and the text you choose, don't forget to include other ecumenical partners and the non-church neighbors in your community!
- Share what you are doing! Besides using social media, please also share your plans and stories with our planning team so that we can celebrate this as a region-wide, mutual observance. (You can share your plans by sending them to Pastor Andrew Heisen at pastor_mtolivet@townisp.com. He will be compiling a list of all congregations taking part.)

Hopefully, this cross-congregational opportunity will enrich all of our churches, help us discover common ground, and lead us into other aspects of our mutual observance including joint service projects and liturgical observances – so as to demonstrate our unity through baptism in Christ.

For example, please save the date for New England CityServe, which will take place on May 6, 2017. This initiative will be hosted by UniteBoston, where churches all across the region will be coming together to identify shared missional goals to serve their neighborhoods. The committee is also planning a joint liturgical gathering in Boston for Fall 2017 along with materials for use in local gathering with your local neighbors.

For more information:

More information regarding this and other reformation observances in New England can be found at the website of the Institute for Christian Unity at <http://www.instituteforchristianunity.org>.

The Commemoration Planning Team would love to hear from you to listen to your ideas and answer questions. We can be reached through Pastor Andrew Heisen of the ELCA at pastor_mtoliv@townisp.com and Dr. Vito Nicastro, Associate Director, Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Archdiocese of Boston, at vito_nicastro@rcab.org.

Additional Resources for Discussion:

ELCA social statement on environment: http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation?_ga=1.195392044.149268272.1454101160

ELCA Bishop's response to encyclical: http://www.elca.org/Resources/Presiding-Bishop-Messages?_ga=1.259436810.149268272.1454101160

Declaration on the Way, From Conflict to Communion Study Guide, JDDJ and other resources: <http://www.elca500.org/articles-and-publications/>

"Lutherans Restoring Creation Study Guide"

<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/Home/highlights/laudato-si---lutheran-study-guide>

Study Guide from Archdiocese of Washington: <http://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Laudato-Si-Study-Guide.pdf>