

Task Force of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relationships
May 15, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Members and Staff Present: David Simmons, Bill Franklin, Margaret Rose, Chuck Robertson, Scott Hayashi, Jaime Briceno, Marisa Tabizon Thompson, Richard Mammana, Denise Yarbrough, Eugene Sutton, Kate Bellam, Luz Montes, Sharon Alexander, Lucinda Mosher

Guest: Kyle Tau (UMC)

People Absent: Walter Baer

1. Call To Order: Bill Franklin

The meeting opened at 11:04am EST with a clarifying discussion on the role of this Task Force. We are to hear from various committees and decide what goes to General Convention. This is not a sign-off or voting body. Our job is to be a mid-point.

2. Opening Prayer: Margaret Rose

Prayer by Bishop Thomas Ken

*O God,
make the door of this house wide enough
to receive all who need human love and fellowship,
and a heavenly Father's care;
and narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride and hate.
Make its threshold smooth enough
to be no stumbling block to children,
or to straying feet,
but rugged enough
to turn back the tempter's power:
make it a gateway
To thine eternal kingdom.
Amen.*

3. Check-in--How are You Navigating COVID-19: Margaret Rose

Margaret introduced two things to guide our check in today.

Matthew 13:52 "And he said to them, therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Roger Cohen – NY times op ed with poem (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/08/opinion/coronavirus-us.html>). At the end is part of a poem by TS Eliot titled *The Journey of the Magi*.

All are invited to reflect on the old and new in this time of COVID. What has been a challenge and what has been an opportunity? What is old and what is new?

4. Approval of the Minutes (Marisa Tabizon Thompson)

The March 3, 2020, minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

5. Overview of the Current Ecumenical and Interreligious Terrain: Margaret Rose

One of the main areas of focus of our Task Force needs to be on the theological work we do. This impacts greatly the various statements such as the Jewish Relations Statement. We are trying to articulate a theology of ecumenism.

There is an Ecumenical Interreligious Relations newsletter (see Extranet) that went out recently, a project of the EIR intern, Hank Jeannel. One of things discussed is the call for unity that is being addressed by ecumenical officers, ecumenical groups, and interfaith organizations, and related re-opening issues, including the economic and racial disparities of COVI 19 health care. The interreligious work that is intentionally offering worship and other shared ventures is also a part of that. On May 24, there will be a memorial service for those who died.

A revised 2020 budget request was submitted. It reflected a mandate to cut expenses by 25%. The lack of travel is greatly assisting with that reduction. Whether this will be implemented depends on income for 2020; this was done to be prepared for potential reductions.

a. Relations with the United Methodist Church and a changed schedule: Margaret Rose

When are we going to meet again (in person)? We don't know at this time. TEC has a "not in the office" situation through at least July 1, and travel is included in this moratorium. Non-essential travel is off for the entire summer. Budgets are being reviewed and adjusted as needed/possible.

The UMC-TEC dialogue is not on hold but is moving along in a different way. We have not changed our plan or proposal. It is with the UMC right now, and their General Conference is delayed to 2021.

b. Update on other dialogues (Richard Mammana and Margaret Rose)

ARC-USA met for the 83rd time last month. A communique was released following the three-day meeting. Theological work begins the first day and is maintained through the time. This normal schedule was observed. This was an international gathering that took place electronically. The work/content was done, but the relationship building was lost in the virtual setting.

Three meetings are scheduled for September: Roman Catholic, PCUSA, Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee.

On the Lutheran side, there are plans for a joint revival. Originally planned for fall of 2020, hosted in New York, there is now an awareness of a need to shift online and discern how an in-person revival might happen later. This work is part of the Evangelism priority led by Canon Stephanie Spellers. Ecumenically, we hope this might also include a recognition and celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Call to Common Mission.

c. Lutheran Developments in Europe (Margaret Rose)

There was a productive meeting to move this forward. Walter Baer will be in touch later with details.

d. Interreligious Relations--RFPUSA and Shoulder to Shoulder

The prayer service (<https://www.rfpusa.org/national-interfaith-prayer-service-for-healing-hope-held-may-7/>) was well planned and others are planned. Shoulder to Shoulder is planning its 10th anniversary celebration and offered an opportunity for interfaith Iftars during Ramadan , Welcome to My Table. <https://www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/ramadan-series>

e. The Rev. Kyle Tau of the United Methodist Church joins us for an update

Rev. Kyle, an Ecumenical Staff Officer for the UMC thinktank, joined the meeting at 11:57 EST and was introduced by Margaret. The Task Force offered quick introductions. For the second time in the history of the UMC, there was a Special Conference held in 2019 to address the ordination of LGBTQIA clergy and the officiating of same sex marriages. (This is an international church with 40-45% of delegates to a conference from Europe, the Philippines, and Africa.) The result was division and sorrow. A task force was tapped to develop a proposal for a resolution of the impasse. That work would have been done this week but was pushed due to COVID19 restrictions. This week would also have been a time to vote on a full communion proposal with TEC. The timing is TBD as everyone tries to reschedule things; next steps will be determined as other things fall in place.

The UMC is active in COVID19 work. Distributing masks and working with refugees and immigrants are major thrusts of this work. UMC is also looking at financial realities and budgets. There are many creative efforts to gather virtually. The first full Council of Bishops gathering was entirely on zoom a few weeks ago.

Q&A:

Q (Scott Hayashi): What would the effect upon this conversation and proposal if TEC does not vote on anything in 2021?

A: The stance would be recognized as understandable. It is not seen as prudent and fair for TEC to be voting on this until the UMC is more settled. A resolution to continue the dialogue would be a good way to move forward.

Q (Sharon Alexander): Is the possibility of meeting virtually [as a General Conference] an option in late 2021?

A: This is being explored but is proving to be a challenge with 900 delegates spread around the world.

Q (Bill Franklin): We were considering a strategy to guide us politically and theologically in these discussions in the House of Bishops. Just an FYI as we do not have specific clarity on next gatherings. This is something that would need a parallel in the House of Deputies. This would prevent one house being blind-sided by the other house. Margaret concurs. Tom Breidenthal (theology committee) is on board with this approach. Eugene says that when this thing finally comes to a vote, people are more likely to vote no out of a lack of understanding rather than antagonism. Engagement and education will be critical for securing a yes vote.

A: What you are suggesting as a strategy is a great idea and we appreciate knowing it. It will be healthy to allow people to discuss this out in the open and over the course of the year. Also, the possibility of a delay due to the pandemic is acceptable and would be part of the intentional work that has happened thus far.

6. Remarks of the President of the House of Deputies Gay Jennings on the upcoming General Convention, and The Episcopal Church in the time of COVID

Gay was not able to join us due to another meeting. Bill Franklin read a note to the Task Force: "We are working towards General Convention taking place as scheduled, and we are also aware we need to look at a variety of scenarios given the serious nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic. When asked if General Convention will be cancelled, I always respond that the General Convention has never been cancelled and the only question is—when the 80th General Convention will be held....In terms of the Task Force's work, you are doing what the Executive Officer Michael Barlowe has suggested, which is to keep on as best you can given the circumstances."

7. Update on the 2021 Lambeth Conference and Anglican Communion relations (Chuck Robertson)

The planning team waited as long as they could before making the final decision to postpone the anticipated Lambeth Conference this summer. It might occur in person in 2021, but that is a hope and the timing is unknown. The Lambeth Conference office is considering our House of Bishop zoom breakout format as an option for Lambeth meetings, especially for Bible Study and specific discussion groups. There is nothing definitive at this point, but it is clear that there is a strong desire to have a Lambeth Conference in some way at some point. The Anglican Alliance, which was created after the last Lambeth Conference, has been working to address disaster need and advocacy efforts. We (TEC) have been working closely with them in all of this.

The pandemic is affording an opportunity to really see the Anglican communion and the larger community outside of TEC, as well as congregation to congregation and diocese to diocese.

Like in the Presiding Bishop's office, this pandemic has caused great change in the Archbishop of Canterbury's and Lambeth Palace's office. It is expected that there will be a see change in his role going forward, with much more focus on the Church of England than the worldwide communion. This is likely to impact ecumenical relations, as well.

ACNA's second generation is starting to rise up and that is leading to an increase in conversation between ACNE and TEC. However, this can only go so far until ACNA defines itself beyond not being TEC or ACC. We are not ready to start a formal discussion with ACNA. (This is an ecumenical question for us – not an Anglican question. For example, their Lambeth invitation was in the category of an ecumenical invitation and not a member invitation.)

8. Working Group Reports

PCUSA Report (Eugene Sutton): There is a bit of uncertainty due to the pandemic in relation to gathering. This relationship is not as high profile as the relationships with the ELCA and the UMC but the group is ready to be more visible. There are significant differences in how we order ourselves, so the trick is how we recognize each other in relation to a reconciliation of orders. There is a way to hold a limited orderly exchange after clergy have been fully formed and trained in their own traditions. This is still under wraps but there was some significant progress in the last meeting.

Nothing else to report. Except perhaps a struggle between Eugene and Scott on who gets David Simmons and his status as a free agent.

UMC (Scott Hayashi): This commission met recently. One of the biggest questions posed was about what we should be doing. It seemed as if the best course of action would be a continuing resolution. We are not able to clarify what happens to the UMC going forward and which, if any, group we would be alignment with if we were to ratify a relationship. The consensus was that there are too many unknowns to legislate at the 2021 General Convention.

Theology (Denise Yarbrough): We agree we want to revise the Ecumenical Relations statement but have not had time to do so yet. The 1988 Jewish-Anglican Relationship document is 140 pages and needs to be edited down for practical use, which Lucinda will do over the summer. Margaret is getting a lot of resources from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) specifically related to Anti-Semitism and what Christian denominations can do.

General Convention (David Simmons): We are waiting to be at the point where we are ready to write things – proposals, blue book reports, etc. There is some input needed on what should/how it should be pursued.

9. Work-Plan, Time-Line, and Schedule for Production of Documents For the 2021 General Convention:

a. Sharon Alexander and Marisa Thompson comment on how the Standing Committee on Structure, etc. organized its Zoom work for Convention in April 2020

The issue of what will happen in 2021 was discussed but no answers were available. We are looking at things that can be done, recognizing that only once before has GC been postponed. So the work of the Standing Commission went forward as needed with preparations for the blue book and specific resolutions. There is an awareness that even if things turn around in the United States, the international world may not be in the same space. Regardless, discussions need to be held on all of these issues, even if it is apart from the legislative process.

Each subcommittee of the SCSGCC had a 2.5-hour meeting to determine low hanging fruit and separate what needs plenary discussions. Assignments were made or completed. This work followed the initial creation of a spreadsheet of tasks and resolutions needed. It was specific and productive.

b. Naming of Tasks and Consideration of Various Models for Organizing our Work: Blue Book Report, Texts of Resolutions, Other Documents and Invitation for Volunteers to Sign Up For Specific Tasks to Get Ready (Margaret Rose)

The creation of a spreadsheet to name what is needed is critical. Once established, members of this Task Force will identify which areas in which they will work. This work will be done by the end of July and then we will meet in plenary (likely via Zoom).

- Blue Book and Legislation Proposals
 - General Report
 - ELCA/ACC/TEC/ELCIC agreement proposal
 - Church of Sweden agreement proposal
 - Licensing and reception of clergy in full communion
 - Title IV/Discipline of non-TEC clergy serving in TEC congregations
- Christian-Jewish Document
- Theology document around ecumenical relations
- Budget conversation around triennial budget
- Updating the ecumenical handbook (currently found at <https://www.edeio.org>)

This is a time for brevity. People are not going to have an appetite for long reports and whatnot. And anything that can be on the consent agenda would be great.

10. Discussion of Most Convenient Dates for Holding Zoom Meetings: Two Hour Meetings Over Several Days in a Row, or Stretched out

This will be determined as the spreadsheet is developed and a way of work defined.

11. Other Business

Luz Montes will be ordained on June 27 at Christ Church Cathedral (Houston)!

12. Closing Prayer--Bill Franklin

A prayer from the Rev. Sam Wells:

God of healing and hope. In Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear. Look with mercy on those who have contracted the Coronavirus, on any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger. Through this time of global concern, by your Holy Spirit bring out the best and not the worst in us. Make us more aware of our interdependence on each other, and of the strength that comes from being One Body in you. Through Christ our wounded healer. Amen

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:41pm EST