



July 1, 2014

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631

Dear Bishop Eaton:

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. We pray God's blessing on you as you anticipate the completion of your first year as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and on all the leaders and members of the ELCA as you pursue your mission: being marked with the cross of Christ, you are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world. The Executive Board of Menonite Church USA has asked me to send this letter of greeting and Christian friendship to you as a representative of all our brothers and sisters in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

It has been a joy and a gift to us in Menonite Church USA to be in relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are deeply grateful for the initiative of the ELCA which led to a formal dialogue between our churches from 2002 to 2004 as well as subsequent reflection and action by the ELCA Conference of Bishops and the ELCA Church Council.

These conversations contributed to the powerful expressions of apology, forgiveness and reconciliation between Lutherans and Menonites which took place at the Lutheran World Federation assembly in Stuttgart, Germany in the summer of 2010. We continue to receive and embrace these words and gestures with great gratitude and thanksgiving. On several occasions since then, including a meeting in Elkhart, Indiana in April 2012, leaders and representatives of both of our churches have gathered to celebrate this new place in our relationship and to pray and ponder together what God might be calling us to now. For us in Menonite Church USA, this process has led us into new reflection on how God wants to heal us from past hurts and use us in bold, new ways together with brothers and sisters in the broader body of Christ. We are grateful for the work of a Lutheran World Federation task force and a Menonite World Conference task force charged with following up on the commitments made in Stuttgart. Both task forces met in Goshen, Indiana in the summer of 2013.

The Lutheran apology has caused us to ask where we need to apologize and seek repentance, both in relation to Lutherans and to others. We regret and confess the sinfulness of the ways in which we and our Anabaptist ancestors have sometimes misrepresented Lutherans and Lutheran practices. This has included unfair and harsh distortions and denigrations, especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In our teaching we have at times been satisfied with exaggerated critiques and generalizations that were too simple (suggesting, for example, that Lutherans uniformly supported repressive governments or absolutized faith while neglecting good works). We have sometimes been tempted to tell the best of our story while telling the worst of your story. At times some of us have

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continued to view Lutherans through the lens of 16<sup>th</sup> century conflicts, neglecting the pain of our separation, and ignoring Lutheran gifts and the potential of working together as ecumenical partners. We want to continue to encourage our teachers, historians and pastors to re-examine our shared history by using resources such as *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*, the report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission.

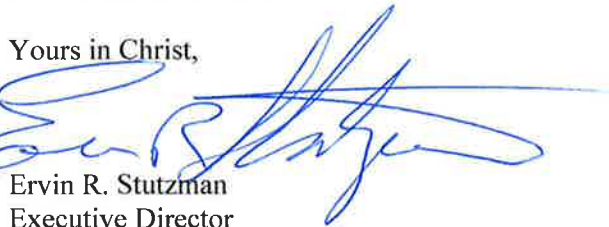
In informal conversations at the edge of some of our formal meetings, our Lutheran brothers and sisters have wondered whether we see you as fully part of the body of Christ. At first the question surprised us, but given our historic differences related to the central matters of baptism and warfare, we came to understand this as a genuine and important question that requires an answer. We are painfully aware that the body of Christ is fractured and deeply compromised. Each of our traditions, with their graces and gifts, also bears wounds, brokenness and sin. We want to affirm that we see Christ in you, that we regard you as brothers and sisters, and that we are on a journey together seeking to be faithful to Jesus. We want to affirm that though the body of Christ is fractured, compromised and broken, we are deeply grateful to find our place in that body together with you, our Lutheran brothers and sisters.

Because being together in the body of Christ is important to us, we want to continue to engage with each other at those places where we differ. We believe that in listening and speaking carefully, in giving and receiving counsel, in studying scripture and entering into prayer together, Jesus will be present to us and God will lead us to greater faithfulness to our common Lord and Savior. We are grateful for opportunities we have had in these past several years to explore together Jesus' way of peace with Lutheran partners, and we are open to new possibilities for continuing those conversations.

Likewise we are grateful for the opportunity for members of our representative world bodies to be in a three-way conversation with each other and Catholic brothers and sisters about our understandings and practices related to baptism. We affirm and support the ongoing dialogue between the Mennonite World Conference, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. All three partners in this dialogue are building on the foundation of trust in one another that our communions have experienced together. We pray that this foundation might help us in moving closer to the unity among his followers that Christ prayed for.

God has been powerfully at work in our relationship these past twelve years. We celebrate this and give thanks. We are eager to see how God wants to continue to bless our relationship and use us as we move forward.

Yours in Christ,



Ervin R. Stutzman  
Executive Director

Copy: Dr. Kathryn M. Lohre, Bishop Donald McCoid, ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations; Cesar Garcia, General Secretary, Mennonite World Conference