

Unrest In Ethiopia Affects WELS And Sister Churches

Recent political unrest in the country of Ethiopia caused some frightening moments for missionaries and pastors of WELS and our sister church, two bodies in Africa.

Last week events scheduled to take place in Ethiopia had to be canceled when riots broke out in several cities. Representatives of the African churches belonging to the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference had planned a meeting in the city of Bishoftu. That meeting was to conclude with the dedication of a new building to house a theological training school operated by the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia.

When the rioting broke out, the U.S. State Department issued a strong advisory that all U.S. citizens should return, if possible, to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, by air travel or take shelter immediately. After some rather close encounters with armed mobs, World Missions Administrator Larry Schlomer and Professor Emeritus Forrest Bivens, who were already in Ethiopia for the planned events, were able to follow WELS Risk Management's plans and make their way safely out of the country. WELS President Mark Schroeder, who arrived in Ethiopia just as the rioting began, was also able to return safely to the United States. All representatives from other African countries and WELS missionaries were also able to depart safely.

News reports indicate that the decision to leave was a wise and necessary one. More than 60 people were killed and more than 200 injured when the rioting spread to Addis Ababa.

We pray for the safety of our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia and for the end of the violence in a normally peaceful country.

WELS NEWS **February 2020**

WELS-ELS-LCMS Continue Annual Informal Discussions

Representatives from WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) met in Jacksonville, Fla., last week for the eighth in a series of annual informal doctrinal discussions. These are "informal" doctrinal discussions, an indication that we recognize that a restoration of fellowship is not anticipated in the near future. Rather, these meetings are intended to provide a forum that increases mutual understanding of each synod's doctrine and practice and to establish good lines of communication between the synods. The discussions have been helpful in identifying where the synods agree and where differences remain.

Topics for this year's discussions included the doctrine of justification (with a focus on objective justification), an area in which the three synods are in complete agreement. Also discussed were the doctrines of the ministry and prayer fellowship, where some differences remain.

New participants this year included Rev. Peter Lange, the newly elected first vice president of the LCMS, and Rev. Paul Prange, the newly appointed administrator for the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations.

Another meeting is planned for next year and will include continuing discussion of the topics of prayer fellowship and the ministry, as well as a discussion of the WELS statement on the roles of man and woman, "Male and Female in God's World."

Serving in Christ,

WELS President Mark Schroeder

New Look For Forward In Christ Magazine

Forward in Christ magazine (FIC) debuted a new look and fresh new features in its January 2020 issue.

The issue includes a redesigned cover and interior pages, brighter and thicker paper, an expanded *Confessions of faith* section, a new Q&A column with accompanying Bible study, and a new column featuring photos from readers.

"The magazine features a stronger emphasis on our community of WELS members from around the world, using images to tell their stories in the new *This is WELS* page," says Mr. Lee Hitter, WELS

director of communications.

A new dedicated *Forward in Christ* website, forwardinchrist.net, and social media pages will develop that community further by offering readers ways to interact with monthly articles as well as share their own stories. "The website is another way for us to engage with our readers," says Hitter. "With the addition of *Forward in Christ* Facebook and Instagram social media sites, our audience will have multiple ways to access and share the engaging content delivered each month by the magazine."

The redesign came about after WELS and Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) conducted a survey in 2019, seeking input on the synod's official magazine, which has been in existence for more than one hundred years. "We were blessed with more than 5,300 responses, each one helpful in realizing the magazine's strengths and opportunities for change," says Mr. Bill Ziche, president of NPH.

While the magazine will look a little different, the goal remains the same. "With its tagline 'A Lutheran voice,' *Forward in Christ* will continue to share confessional Lutheran content in every issue with Jesus Christ at the core," says Rev. John Braun, FIC's executive editor.

Check out the new *Forward in Christ* in your congregation today. Also explore *Forward in Christ's* new website for additional content. At forwardinchrist.net, you can sign up to receive a free weekly e-newsletter filled with articles, photos, and sneak peeks delivered right to your e-mail inbox. Like *Forward in Christ* magazine on Facebook. Follow *Forward in Christ* magazine on Instagram.

Order a subscription to *Forward in Christ* at nph.net/forwardinchrist.

Funding Secured For Theological Education Facility In Vietnam

Through the support and prayers of WELS members, WELS has surpassed its goal of receiving \$2 million to support a theological education facility in Vietnam. This funding will pay for the land, building construction, and the first two years of operating expenses.

The communist Vietnamese government invited WELS in 2018 to build this facility in Vietnam's capital city of Hanoi to train leaders of the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC).

"Since I became Christian in 1994, I've been searching and praying for a church body that would bring me the true Word of God," says Rev. Zang, one of the HFC leaders who is receiving training. "I have been to much training in the last several years, but none like WELS. Finally, God sends a church that teaches the true Word of God to Vietnam. The Word of God has brought peace to our community,

and we are sure that our salvation is only found in Christ Jesus."

WELS first had contact with the Hmong Fellowship Church in 2011, when a leader in that church got in touch with Rev. Bounkeo Lor, a Hmong pastor who then served in Kansas City, Kan., after reading his online sermons. Lor made his first training trip to Vietnam in 2012. Members of the Pastoral Studies Institute began to accompany Lor on some of these trips starting in 2016. Since that initial trip, the church has doubled in size—now with more than 120,000 members—and discovered the true message of God's grace.

"The members of the HFC have been grateful for the message of the gospel, that they are saved by God's grace alone," says Rev. Xiong, one of the HFC leaders receiving training. "Now they are eager to have the opportunity to use the center in Hanoi for training pastors in the Word of God, especially in law and gospel."

Lor, who now serves as Hmong Asia ministry coordinator, says the training center is important for the ministry in Vietnam so that Hmong leaders can continue to grow in their understanding of God's Word. "Nowadays, many churches call themselves Christian, but it is sad that they don't teach the true Word of God anymore," says Lor. "One of the brothers in the HFC told me that before they met WELS, they thought that every church taught the truth from the Bible, but now they know the differences between true and ideology teaching. They praise God for the teaching that WELS extends to their church body. They are eager to bring whatever they've learned from WELS to their leaders and members."

So far, land has already been purchased in Vietnam, and plans are being made for construction to begin on a new campus that will include a worship space, dormitories and kitchen facilities, ministry offices, and four classrooms.

To date, more than 550 WELS congregations have given offerings to this campaign, and another 2,300 individuals and groups have offered special gifts or commitments. "While we trust our Lord to lovingly provide resources for the work we do together in his name," says Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Christian Giving, "we marvel at how our Savior moved his people to give so quickly and generously to this unique opportunity. We praise Jesus and thank his people for their joyful, heartfelt participation!"

Lor asks for WELS members' continued prayers on the ministry: "Please continue to ask God to bless the center so that it may serve more people, not only Hmong but also other minorities in Vietnam."

Learn more about this opportunity at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.