

## **WELS NEWS**

### **September, 2017**

#### **Worldwide Fellowship Gathers In Germany**

Every three years, pastors and leaders from around the world, representing two dozen Lutheran church bodies in fellowship with WELS, gather for a meeting of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). Celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the most recent convention was held in historic Grimma, Germany (near Leipzig and Wittenberg), from June 29 through July 2. The convention was hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK) of Germany. Participants gathered in the Gymnasium St. Augustine, a school founded in a former monastery in 1550 to train scholars for the Lutheran church as well as for government service.

The participants heard essays highlighting the Lutheran Reformation, the Reformed Reformation, the Radical Reformation, and the Catholic Reformation, written by pastors Holger Weiss, Samuel Choi, Julio Ascarrunz, and Dr. Timothy Schmeling, respectively. Highlights of the convention included requests for membership from three additional church bodies in Hong Kong, Ethiopia, and east Asia.

The convention approved the “Ninety-five Theses for the Twenty-First Century,” a new document prepared to clearly state the basics of the Christian faith for use in congregations and for outreach. The convention also had the opportunity to view the new film *A Return to Grace: Luther’s Life and Legacy*.

A closing communion service was held in the Augustinian church next to the school. The walls of this famous structure, in which Martin Luther frequently preached during his travels, echoed with the sound of the congregation singing “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” and many other Reformation-era hymns. Convention participants and guests, as well as many members of the ELFK, celebrated their bond of fellowship as they heard the Word of God preached and received the body and blood of their Savior in the Lord’s Supper. Following the service, the ELFK served a meal for everyone as participants slowly said farewell to each other.

Along with a number of other WELS representatives, I had the privilege of attending this meeting. One of the purposes of the meeting is to provide encouragement to smaller confessional churches around the world as they face unique challenges in their cultures. But, as always, it was the WELS representatives who came away encouraged. We marveled at the firm commitment and the faithful witness of our fellow Lutherans around the world, and we joined in thanking God for the continuing spread of his saving message.

The next CELC convention is scheduled for 2020 in Seoul, Korea. Learn more about the CELC at [celc.info](http://celc.info).

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

### **Our Great Heritage**

A beautiful church packed with more than 700 booming voices all passionately singing out “A Mighty Fortress” set the tone for WELS’ 64th biennial synod convention. The theme for this year’s convention is “Our Great Heritage,” a distinctive Lutheran nod to the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation being celebrated by Christians around the world this year. “Our Great Heritage” reminds convention delegates and attendees that our faith is rooted in the teachings of Martin Luther, whose mission was to teach Christians of his day, and for centuries after, that the Bible is the only true Word of God.

WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder presided over the opening worship service, Mon., July 31, at St. Mark’s in Watertown, Wis. Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga., served as preacher, delivering a sermon reflecting on Martin Luther’s famous statement, “Here I stand.”

“If we can be known as the church that proclaims radical grace, that’s an excellent thing because that’s where the church has stood and I hope that’s where we stand in the next 500 years,” he says. “The privilege of being able to speak to the convention and being asked to share God’s Word with them, especially on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it was a wonderful honor.” The worship service can be viewed online. (Please note that the service is split between two videos, which can be found on the right-hand side of the screen.)

President Schroeder presented his “President’s Report” Tuesday morning. After discussing the state of the synod and how WELS ministry reflects principles of our Lutheran heritage, he concluded:

“As we mark 500 years of the Lutheran Reformation, we pray that God will move us to rededicate ourselves to the biblical truths that God so graciously restored to his church and which he has passed down to us as the heirs of that Reformation. In every sermon preached, in every Bible class taught, in every opportunity to share what we believe, may he enable us to know and confess that we are saved by God’s grace alone, that we receive that blessing through faith alone, and that we are sure of that truth because of Scripture alone. Holding on to that heritage, we will by God’s grace be permitted to share in the glorious privilege of serving as his witnesses, and we will have the joy of passing that heritage down to the next generations of God’s people.” The full report can be read online.

Continuing with the theme, Prof. John Brenner read the convention essay. He titled it “God’s Word is our great heritage.”

Brenner says, “Through the Reformation, God delivered some really tremendous gifts to his people, but Lutherans really have not always retained those gifts as other Christians, including Old Testament people, didn’t either. So I wanted to emphasize how great our heritage is and the fact because it’s that great, we want to do everything in our power to preserve it, but then also to share it.”

This is the second synod convention essay that Brenner had the privilege to present. He teaches systematic theology, Christian doctrine, and church history at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., where he’s served for 26 years. The essay is available to read online.

### **A Growing Lutheran Family**

On Wednesday, the synod in convention had the joy of officially welcoming three Lutheran synods from around the world into our fellowship. All three synods were unanimously voted into fellowship with a standing ovation.

Representing the synods were Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu from the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE), Rev. Titus Tse from South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) in Hong Kong, and two pastors from the East Asia Lutheran Synod.

After growing up in a Christian church in Ethiopia and having an opportunity to study at a Lutheran seminary in the U.S., Kebede knew he wanted to take the solid Bible-based doctrine back with him to Ethiopia. He founded the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia in 2012 and, at the same time, added a seminary, the Maor Theological College, so that he can teach other Christian pastors, in addition to Lutheran pastors, the pure Word of God. Today, the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia has nearly 400 members and has already seen graduates from its seminary.

Kebede says the declaration of fellowship is a historic moment for the LCE. “It is by God’s grace and we are very happy; it is meaningful for us because faithfulness to Scripture is a very important matter of life and death. Jesus says ‘If you hold to my teaching . . .’ So, faithfulness to what he says, what the Scriptures say from Genesis chapter 1 to the last chapter of Revelation, is very important. We are very happy because we know that WELS is faithful to the Scriptures and is a confessional Lutheran church.”

The East Asia Lutheran Synod was established in February 2017. It was formed from five Lutheran groups and has 280 baptized members. The synod is just getting started but is already looking ahead to how it can expand and grow as well as begin international mission work.

One of the pastors said, “It’s a numerous number of people who come to convention, and it’s a blessing to see there’s a huge church group at our back to support our church even though we are very far away and in a very different situation.”

Rev. Titus Tse from the South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission in Hong Kong attended the convention to participate in the declaration of fellowship on behalf of SALEM. Founded in 1977, SALEM has 10 congregations and six pastors. The synod’s history is tied closely to Asia Lutheran Seminary, the WELS ministerial training school located in Hong Kong.

Tse said, “We recognize that it’s important that we’re keeping the faith, and we can share with future generations the importance of keeping the faith because of this relationship with WELS, a church that shares our faith.”

To learn more about all of WELS’ sister synods around the world, visit [celc.info](http://celc.info).