

WELS NEWS
January, 2017

Informal discussions continue between
ELS, LCMS, and WELS

Leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) met Nov. 29–Dec. 1 to continue the informal discussions that began in 2012. Once again, the discussions were beneficial, both for sharing information and for discussing doctrine.

One session was spent talking about the amazing opportunities that face confessional Lutherans around the world. The LCMS, for example, will be pursuing fellowship talks with a huge Lutheran church in Madagascar. WELS is interacting with churches in Vietnam and Ethiopia. All three synods are in contact with different Lutheran groups in Kenya and in India. It was good to compare notes about our various international contacts.

Time was spent discussing “cooperation in externals.” This term refers to activities that are carried out jointly with others outside of church fellowship—activities that do not involve the means of grace or give the impression of unity in faith. There was a good amount of agreement on the principles involved here, although participants didn’t discuss current or past applications in depth.

Also discussed were the roles of men and women in God’s world and in the church. For decades, differences between the LCMS and ELS/WELS have been recognized on this issue, and those differences showed themselves in our discussions. However, it was valuable to hear firsthand what is taught in our various synods, and that large areas of agreement were evident on issues such as the existence of an order of creation and on women’s ordination.

Plans were made to continue another round of informal discussions next year. Though no one imagines that there is an easy or quick path to church fellowship, these meetings have served a useful purpose in learning about each other’s ministries and in clarifying our doctrinal positions.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Family fun at WELS Day at the Bucks

Several hundred WELS members enjoyed an afternoon of basketball, food, and fellowship during WELS Day at the Milwaukee Bucks on Dec. 3. The Bucks defeated the Brooklyn Nets 112-103 before a crowd of nearly 16,000 fans. “We were thrilled to see the response for our inaugural WELS Day with the Bucks. A big thank you to all of the WELS members, churches, schools, and youth groups who took part and were able to enjoy seeing our Bucks extend their winning streak to four games in a row,” says Josh Schedler, premium sales manager.

The Bucks offered WELS members discounted tickets and both a pre-and postgame fan experience. Prior to tip-off, members could sit courtside and watch the players during pregame warm-ups. It was a great opportunity to see the NBA stars up close. Then WELS member Brian Davison, lead vocal for Koiné, stood center court and sang the national anthem.

After the final buzzer, the Bucks invited children of WELS members to go onto the court and shoot a free throw. Seven-year-old Andrew Berger, son of Rev. Ben and Heather Berger, enjoyed his chance to show off his basketball skills. “Shooting a free throw on the Bucks court was really cool,” he says. “I almost made it. Now I need to go home and practice.”

“We encourage you to invite out more of your WELS family and friends next season as we look forward to growing this event each year! If you’re looking to get out to another game in the new year, the Milwaukee Bucks are hosting a Faith and Family Night on February 24, 2017,” says Schedler.

Confessional Lutheranism in Europe

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod shares fellowship with small Lutheran church bodies all over the world as part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. The WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations oversees our relationship with these church bodies and helps them with pastoral instruction.

Many of these church bodies are very small and are in countries with not only no Lutheran presence but also dwindling interest in Christianity. Even though small numbers and lack of interest inhibit growth, God’s church lives on in these areas with a few

faithful people with a mission to grow and reinvigorate Christianity.

While Christians around the world are preparing to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther's Reformation, our brothers and sisters in Germany will have a front-row seat. The Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK) in Germany currently has 1,241 members, 16 congregations, and 17 pastors.

This past May at its synodical convention, the ELFK introduced a new hymnal and declared fellowship with the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church in Albania and St. John's congregation in Finland. In addition, members in Southern Germany have an official building to call their church home after renovating a pizzeria in Baden-Württemberg. The new facility will also serve members in northern Switzerland and Austria.

The Lutheran Church of Portugal (LCP) was founded in 1997 and has 30 members in two congregations. Despite its small size, the LCP is looking to expand evangelism efforts, preparing another pastor for the church, developing Portuguese publications with WELS Multi-Language Publications, engaging in a program to commemorate the Reformation, and attempting to reach the mainstream Portuguese media.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor and CICR Liaison to the LCP Kenneth Cherney says, "Our brothers and sisters in Portugal are a small but dedicated group. They love each other deeply and their commitments to confessional Lutheranism and to reaching out with the gospel are heartfelt. Although Portugal is a small country, Portuguese is the sixth most spoken language in the world. Outreach from Portugal has reached people from Portugal's former colonies around the world and has the potential to reach even more."

Scandinavia is home to three Lutheran church bodies—the Lutherska Bekännelsekyrkan (LBK) or "Lutheran Confessional Church" in Sweden, which is the "mother" church with 230 members, LBK-Norway with 70 members, and LBK-Finland with 40 members.

Martin Luther College Professor and CICR Liaison to Scandinavia Keith Wessel reports: "Growth in these churches is slow, largely due to the non-religious culture of Scandinavia.

However, there are at least two young men nearing the end of their pastoral training. We have been supporting their training with the WELS Scandinavia Fund. We also have been using funds to support pastors over there who are experiencing hard financial times; none of the clergy are full-time and thus must support themselves and families as they minister.”

Wessel continues, “Thankfully, God has preserved a remnant in the true Christian faith and their presence in those lands gives us an opportunity to help them reach out with the Word of truth.”