
The International Lutheran Council – achieving its potential



Dr Samuel Nafzger, former Executive Secretary of the ILC follows up his article about the history and development of the Council with a consideration of its future opportunities

Next month the International Lutheran Council will be holding its next worldwide conference in Niagara Falls, Canada. Now, on the eve of this conference, I have been invited to prepare a sequel to an article which I wrote for the February 2011 issue of **ILC NEWS** on the future of the ILC. The specific request is that I, on the basis of my 18 years of experience as the Council's first Executive Secretary, suggest some steps that the Council might take in order to develop its full potential in support of confessional Lutheranism around the world. This article is my response to that request.

If we are to speak about the **development** of the Council's potential, however, we must first review what the ILC is and what it was put together to do. We shall also need to say a few words about the Council's theological foundation. With these two things clearly in view, we should then be in a better position to offer some specific recommendations that the Council might consider implementing in order to go about developing its full potential.

What is the ILC and what does it do?

The Constitution of the International Lutheran Council, adopted unanimously at a meeting of

confessional Lutheran churches from around the world back in 1993, describes what the Council was originally designed to be and to do. The ILC, according to its Constitution, is a **worldwide association of established confessional Lutheran church bodies**. It is an **organization** of its member churches. It **enables** its member churches to **share information** with one another, to **study theological questions and concerns together**, and to **issue statements** when asked to do so by its members. It works for the **coordinated carrying out** of the mission and ministry of the church. It seeks to **nurture and to strengthen relationships** between confessional Lutheran churches throughout the world. It provides a **forum** to which member churches can bring their theological and practical needs.

The ILC's Constitution not only describes what the Council is and what it seeks to do. It also says what the Council is not. It expressly states: "**The ILC is not a church body nor does it carry out churchly functions.**" The Council "does not intend to prescribe any course of action for its member bodies, but rather seeks to assist and strengthen them in their confessional witness and mission." This understanding of what the Council is, therefore, means that "membership in the Council does not imply or require the existence of formally declared altar and church fellowship between member church bodies."

In presenting its confessional basis in this way, the Council intentionally provides for a formal relationship between confessional Lutheran church bodies not in church fellowship with one another. Significantly, this relationship is founded on the acceptance of the Council's "Confessional Basis." Membership in the Council requires **acceptance of this article**. Membership in the Council, moreover also means that all member churches agree to regard the other members in

the Council as “fellow Christians” and as “confessional Lutherans.”

This brief review of what the ILC is clearly shows that the ILC was **not** put together for the purpose of “circling the wagons” of Lutheran churches in church fellowship in opposition to all those not in full doctrinal agreement with them. On the contrary, the ILC has had from its very beginning the goal of bringing together Lutherans from around the world who want to remain faithful to the Bible and to the Lutheran Confessions for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel, for the mutual encouragement of one another, for giving a joint witness to the world, and to “foster” and to “preserve” complete agreement in confession which “manifests itself at the altar and in the pulpit.” And this brings us directly to the matter of the Confessional Basis of the ILC itself.

The ILC’s confessional basis

Article II of the ILC’s Constitution presents the Council’s “Confessional Basis.” This Article states:

The International Lutheran Council (ILC) is a worldwide association of established confessional Lutheran church bodies which proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of an unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord* as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God.

This statement summarizes the theological confession on which the International Lutheran Council stands. In order more fully to grasp the significance of the confessional basis of the Council as stated in this article, it may be helpful to say a few words regarding the historical context in which this statement was prepared.

The International Lutheran Council was formed by Lutheran churches whose leaders had been meeting together over a period of some 40 years, ever since the formation of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947. Among the most important areas of doctrinal disagreement among the Lutheran churches of the world at this time had to do with the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the nature of its authority. While acknowledging “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all

church doctrine and practice” (*Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation, 1947*), many of the theologians of the most prominent churches which organized the LWF rejected the traditional understanding of the Bible as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God. They defended the use of historical critical methodology in the study of Holy Scripture, and held that many of the events reported in the writings of the Old and New Testaments could not be regarded as in fact historical. This approach to the study of the Bible results in the affirming of discrepancies and contradictions within Scripture that call into question the Gospel itself.

The church bodies that formed the International Lutheran Council strongly disagreed with the understanding of the nature of the Bible and its authority as presented above. These Lutheran churches therefore came together to form the ILC for the express purpose of proclaiming the Gospel, that is, **the Good News of the forgiveness of sins through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus as reported in Holy Scripture**. To make certain that this was the understanding of the content of the Gospel, the word “unconditional” was included in the ILC’s statement of its Confessional Basis. The member churches of the ILC accept **unconditionally** the Scriptures for what they claim to be, namely, the inspired and infallible Word of God itself, written down by human beings and therefore the timeless and final norm of what the Gospel is and what God’s will is for the way Christians live their lives in all times and places, just as the writings in the 1580 *Book of Concord* confess.

Suggestions for the ILC as it moves into the 21st Century

Taking into account the self understanding of the ILC as a council of confessional Lutheran churches and of the confessional basis of what it stands for and confesses, I encourage the member churches of the ILC to take the following actions at its upcoming conference in Niagara Falls.

1. Establish Wittenberg Germany as the international headquarters of the International Lutheran Council. The ILC is a council of autonomous Lutheran churches from around the world and not merely an adjunct of any one of them. While The Lutheran

Church- Missouri Synod is by far the largest of its members, the Council has 34 member churches, representing widely different cultures, colours and circumstances. The Council as it actually exists gives witness to the universality of the Gospel message it proclaims. And I can think of no better place than the birthplace of the Reformation where Martin Luther re-discovered the Gospel as taught in Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the ILC to become identified with this organization.

2. Provide for increased staff services. If the ILC is to reach its potential in support of confessional Lutheran influence around the world, it must have an Executive Secretary who can be more available in each of the five world areas into which the ILC has divided itself. The ILC does not need more structure or organization to make its influence felt, but it does need more visibility and guidance from its Executive Secretary to coordinate and guide the purposes for which the Council has been brought into existence.
3. Make greater use of the provision in the Council's Constitution to issue statements on current questions facing the church today. There are many, many Lutheran churches around the world who would be supportive of the confessional basis of the Council's position on issues such as human sexuality and life issues, if only they could be made aware of what it is.
4. Keep in touch with the leadership of the Lutheran churches around the world and with their leaders, including the Lutheran World Federation, including those who disagree with the ILC's confessional basis. Good things happen when Christians meet in discussion with other Christians with whom they have disagreement. Make it difficult for those who disagree with positions taken by the Council to misrepresent or caricature what the ILC stands for by speaking with them directly. Confessional Lutherans in faithfulness to St. Peter's exhortation to "regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a

defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (I Peter 3:15) must be eager to engage in conversation with those with whom they disagree.

I concluded my February 2011 article titled "The International Lutheran Council Looks to the Future" with the following words, which I want to use once again as the conclusion to this article on how the ILC, with God's blessing, can reach its potential.

If ever there was a need for the truly confessional Lutheran churches from around the world to stand together in witness to the beautiful Gospel message of the full forgiveness of sin, life and salvation through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, then it is today. If ever there was a need for the truly confessional Lutheran churches from around the world to make a common witness to the implications which faith in Christ has for the way we live our lives in accordance with God's inspired Word, it is now. If ever there was a need for the confessional Lutheran churches from all over the world to meet together regularly to build up and encourage one another in bearing the heavy burden of leadership in the church and in their personal walk with God, it is now.

These words, I am convinced, are more true today than when I first wrote them. May God bless and guide the work of the International Lutheran Council so that it may, with

His blessing, reach its full potential.

Samuel H. Nafzger

ILC Africa World Area Conference in Nairobi

The Most Rev'd Christian Ekong, national President/Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria

The International Lutheran Council (ILC) Africa World Area Conference held at CORAT AFRICA Centre, Nairobi, Kenya on June 13 and 14, 2012.

The Conference had the following Africa Lutheran Church Leaders present:

The Most Rev. Christian Ekong -Lutheran Church of Nigeria, President/Archbishop,
 Bishop Dr. Wilhelm Weber Jr. -Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Bishop,
 Most Rev. Dr. Walter Obare -Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya, Archbishop
 The Rev. Dr. Dieter Reinstorf -Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa - Bishop

In attendance was the Rev. John Halakhe, General Secretary of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya. Absent during the meeting was the Rt. Rev. Dr. Paul Koffi Fynn of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana.



The highlight of the conference included:

- Worship
- Welcome Address
- Keynote Speech
- Deliberation on Challenges facing ILC Churches in Africa
 - Neo Pentecostalism
 - Ordination of Women
 - Same Sex Marriage
 - Poverty
 - Alcoholism and HIV/AIDS
 - Synergy in Further Theological Education within the region.

The Conference further considered seeking to welcome emerging Lutheran Churches in the region to register into ILC. Churches in-view included: Southern Sudan, Liberia, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Lutheran Church in Madagascar and Eritrea.

Deliberating towards 500 years of Reformation, Africa – ILC Churches focused on creating greater awareness of Lutheran Theologies and Lutheranism and re-emphasizing the reading of the Book of Concord and Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. Other suggestions included a

publication of Lutheranism in Africa and the presentation of a work on the Challenges of Pentecostalism.

Each ILC member church had an opportunity to report on her church.

The ILC church leaders in Africa thanked God for the privileged of meeting for the first time, ever, as a regional conference and prayed that such would continue to strengthen their fellowship.

70th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Sergio Adrián Fritzler, Director Seminario Concordia, IELA

“Remember those earlier days” (Hebrew 10) with these motivating words, near to one thousand persons, gathered on Monday April 30 to celebrate the 70 years of existence of Concordia Seminary. Half of the crowd came from the interior of Argentina, showing the concern and identification with the institution. There were also present at the celebration representatives from ILC churches (IELB of Brazil, IELCHI of Chile, IELPA of Paraguay, ICEL of Bolivia, the church of Uruguay and LCMS of USA, also representative of the Lutheran Hour Ministry) a demonstration of fraternal confessional theology.

The celebration had a full day of activities, beginning in the morning with the uncovering of a remembrance plaque (Eben-ezer) remember those earlier days and recognizing the goodness of God in preserving this vital tool for the mission of the church during so many years.

Afterwards followed a Eucharistic worship celebration. Pastor Carlos Nagel, president of IELA was the preacher, bringing the words of Psalm 126 as the basis for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. In the afternoon the “Edgar Kroeger” Museum was dedicated, which gathered photographs and elements of the past to educate the new generations in the identity of those that have preceeded in the faith.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina started Concordia Seminary in 1942, during the Second World War, due to needs and the political barrier with Brazil

(since Brazil was allied, and Argentina not, our candidates to study in the Seminary couldn't cross the frontiers). It was started in the quarter of Belgrano, in the city of Buenos Aires. Later it moved to Chillavert and in 1948 finally inaugurated on its own land and buildings in José León Suárez. This institution has prepared near to 180 candidates for the pastoral ministry, that served in different places worldwide, especially in their homeland. At present there are 470 students in 6 different programs (including 2 programs for laypersons), and it is serving in 11 countries of Hispanic America with the help of LCMS.

We express thanks to our good Lord for his goodness in Jesus Christ, and for hearing his faithful when they plead for more labourers to his harvest, to call and send them to preach the Gospel of the Cross.

In Brazil 5000 members gather to celebrate IELB's 108th Anniversary

The Rev'd Mario Lehenbauer, Executive for Mission Board and Mercy Ministry and Project Coordinator for IELB

More than five thousand people gathered at the event Centre Werner Wanderer on Sunday morning of June 24, 2012 for the worship of praise in celebration of 108 years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil. This was the first time that the worship of the Church's anniversary was held outside of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (where more than 70% of the 238.000 IELB's members live). Organized by the Itaipu Lake District, the worship of 108 Years of IELB gathered in city of Marechal Cândido Rondon in a worship with the participation of over 50 pastors of the Church, as well as members from other regions of Brazil.

Seats were provided inside the Centre, enabling a large number of people to be comfortably accommodated to accompany the worship of the celebration. Even so, many people were standing in the Centre of events, since the public has surpassed the expectations of organizers.



Before the worship was held a civic Act, which included the participation of several civil, military and ecclesiastic authorities. Among them were the Mayor of Marechal Cândido Rondon, Mr. Moacir Froehlich, the president of IELB Rev. Egon Kopereck, the president of the District, Pastor Cleydes Kloss, the city councilor Mr. Ito Rannov, among others.

The preacher was the President of IELB, Pastor Kopereck, who in his message emphasized the motto for 2012, based on Psalm 62.7: "The Lord is my rock and my shelter."

A special moment was the tribute paid by the National Board of IELB to the Emeritus pastor Guilherme Lüdke, who completed 103 years on July 30. Rev. Lüdke lives in the city of Marechal Cândido Rondon and is the oldest pastor alive in IELB. To thank him for all the years of dedication to the Ministry and witness of faith in the Saviour Jesus, a commemorative metal card was given to him by National Board of IELB's Officials. The frame of this remembrance was made with original timbers of the houses of the Concordia Seminary in Porto Alegre.



After the worship that went until noon was served lunch for more than 2500 people in the Expo Park of the city of Marechal Cândido Rondon.

Washington, Missouri
July 25, 2012

EELSF elects new president

The Église Évangélique Luthérienne—Synode de France (EELSF) —



Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France) has elected Rev. Roger Jones as its president in succession to Rev. Jean Thiébaud Haessig, who retires in August this year.

The election took place at the synodical convention in Châtenay-Malabry on 18-20 May 2012. Roger Jones is pastor of Saint Sauveur in Paris.

40 years of SELK 1972-2012

Commentary by The Rev. Hans-Joerg Voigt, Bishop of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (Germany)

A few days ago a friend of mine from the USA, Brent Smith, asked about what I considered to be the decisive



factors in the merger process of the Lutheran Confessional Churches in Germany, of which the final result was achieved on 25 June 1972, the Day of the Augsburg Confession; and whether the experiences leading up to that event could be useful for our day. It was a question about how to interpret and evaluate an historical process. Let me attempt to give an answer.

From the very beginning, already in the 19th century, there were contacts, theological and personal exchanges, mutual recognition, but also dissociation and separation between the various, usually rather small Lutheran confessional churches. And for a long time the

various theological viewpoints were considered to be insurmountable.

The tremendous spiritual catastrophe of German National Socialism and, resulting from that, the disastrous result of World War II had a deep influence on the German church scene. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia (Old Lutherans) lost at least two-thirds of its congregations in the former German areas of Eastern Europe; it took a tremendous effort to gather the refugees in the remaining congregations.

With this rather traumatic experience as a background, and the unstinting assistance of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), doctrinal discussions were initiated between the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Saxony and Other States (ELFK), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Old Prussia (ELAK) and the (old) Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SelK), resulting in the adoption of a theological document of unity (*Einigungssätze*). It was now possible to practice full church fellowship, including pulpit exchanges and inter-communion. This represented a theologically decisive step.

The establishment in Oberursel near Frankfurt of a joint theological training institution was of special significance. Here too the LCMS helped to give birth to the venture of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. And it was evidence of considerable spiritual greatness and willingness to forgive when the North American Lutherans with the so-called “care packages” gave extensive help and assistance to those they had just defeated in war with considerable sacrifices on their own part. Those born later should not forget that.

From that point on the future pastors of the church played soccer together, smoked Lucky Strike or German cigarettes, shared their limited rations and eventually began to drink some Torgau beer. And, I almost forgot: together they engaged in good confessional theology. These were the pastors who twenty years later, joined by responsible parishioners, worked toward the organizational unity of the Lutheran confessional churches that had already shown theological agreement over the years, at least humanly speaking. Next to the Holy Spirit we want to express to these people

our cordial gratitude for 40 years of successful union.

What is it that we can learn and maintain from this process today?

1. Various crises, whether of a personal nature or beyond, even catastrophes, despite the personal sufferings they may have caused, can become God's possibilities for renewal.
2. Church unity needs a firm theological foundation. In these days faithful adherence to the Holy Scriptures and the orientation of our conscience to God's Word is a dire need.
3. Even a "church marriage" from time to time needs help from outside. To the members of the LCMS we express our special thanks this 25 June 2012.
4. If spiritual and theological unity thinks it can survive in the long run without organizational union, then it will stand on shaky ground. It can break apart any time since church orders and by-laws are but the practical rules for our life together that have been drawn from theological tenets. The constitution (*Grundordnung*) of the SELK, which took some time to agree on, is really the one celebrating this birthday.

The Consistory of the SELK (*Kirchenleitung*) has decided not to celebrate the 40th birthday of the church officially or in a special way. That is to take place, if God grants grace, on the 50th anniversary. But from my point of view the 8th church-wide national assembly of the SELK 2012 turned out to be a giant birthday party. That during these wonderful days in May my beloved church was able to celebrate so happily and so piously, and that those issues we are constantly fighting about played no role at all, this fills me with thankfulness and confidence.

Therefore, God's blessings on your birthday, my beloved Mother Church

- into which I was reborn in holy baptism
- which told me the stories of the Bible and preached to me God's Word as admonition and consolation
- which is the body of our Redeemer Jesus Christ – together with other churches.

Dear Forty-Year Old, we know of course quite well that you are fifty times older! So let me

say it the American way: Happy birthday, dear SELK!

The Rev'd Hans-Joerg Voigt, Bishop
*Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church
(Germany)*

News from Asia

The following is excerpted from the Asia in Mission Newsletter. Full stories from the June 2012 issue can be accessed at: <http://www.asiainmission.org/newsletter>

ALEA initiates service-learning projects

On March 31, Asia Lutheran Education association (ALEA) board had the privilege of financially supporting service learning projects in Asia. Projects were supported by the Allan and Sandy Schmidt Service Learning Grant, a fund established to assist ALEA member schools in initiating Service-Learning projects.

Macau

Deaf fellowship takes off

A much anticipated fellowship for the deaf is now a reality in Macau. The fellowship started last fall through the new church plant in Macau, a partnership effort between the Lutheran Church--Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) and the LCMS mission in Macau, and through the long term ministry of Deaconess Carol Halter.

Philippines

First philippines CHE training

For the first time ever in the history of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, seventeen leaders from different Lutheran congregations travelled hundreds of miles to attend the Community Health Education Vision Training held at the Lutheran Theological Seminary and Training Center, Baguio City on May 29-June 1, 2012.

China

CLiMB conference

Chinese Lutherans in Asia and the US met together in fellowship and ministry at the April 18-20 annual conference of the Chinese Lutherans in Mission Building (CLiMB). CLiMB is an association of congregations, lay people, pastors, and missionaries in the LCMS

that are engaged in ministry to Chinese or ministry in Cantonese and Mandarin. At the conference, participants heard presentations on Christian leadership, shared in fellowship, and discussed new ministry in the US.

Thailand

Student center moves forward

The Mae Rim Student Center, located just outside of Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand, has been serving children from disadvantaged ethnic minority families for many years, providing them with housing and the opportunity to attend school while being cared for in a loving Christian environment and nurtured in their faith. For the past three years, the Concordia Welfare and Education Foundation – Thailand (CWEFT) has provided support to the centre which has been run by Pastor Prajak and his wife from its inception.

Hong Kong

Filipino groups in Hong Kong enjoy fellowship

The Filipino Prayer Share Care Group (FPSC) from Church of All Nations in Hong Kong and Amazing Grace Lutheran Church (AGLC) Filipino group celebrated God's love for their three years inter-fellowship with devotion and sports fun at South Bay Close, Repulse Bay in Hong Kong on May 1.

Korea

Joint retreat for lay church members

On April 15, nearly 200 church members participated in the 2012 Joint Retreat for the

Gyeonggi and Incheon Area, which was held at Central Lutheran Church in Seoul. It was organized by the pastors' association of the area, which was financially supported by the General Assembly of the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK).

Vietnam

Korean service team visit

Seoul Foreign School (SFS), an international school in South Korea, has been serving with LCMS World Mission Vietnam for four years. Their service this year included two days in Phu Tho working at a primary school in Phuong Vy to build a sports field and two days at Thai Nguyen University tutoring college students in English.

News items for ILC news

News items are sought for the next issue of ILC News from all member churches of the ILC. It is preferred that submissions are made through the church's leadership, and in the English language.

Submissions should be e-mailed to the editor, with photographs where appropriate, at the address given below. Material for the November issue is requested by the beginning of October.



ILC News is published quarterly to provide information for and about churches associated with the International Lutheran Council. Articles for publication and requests for additional copies of the publication (free of charge) should be sent either to the Editor or to the Executive Secretary of the Council.

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ILC News is also available via the internet from the Council's website: <http://www.ilc-online.org>