

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY REPORT

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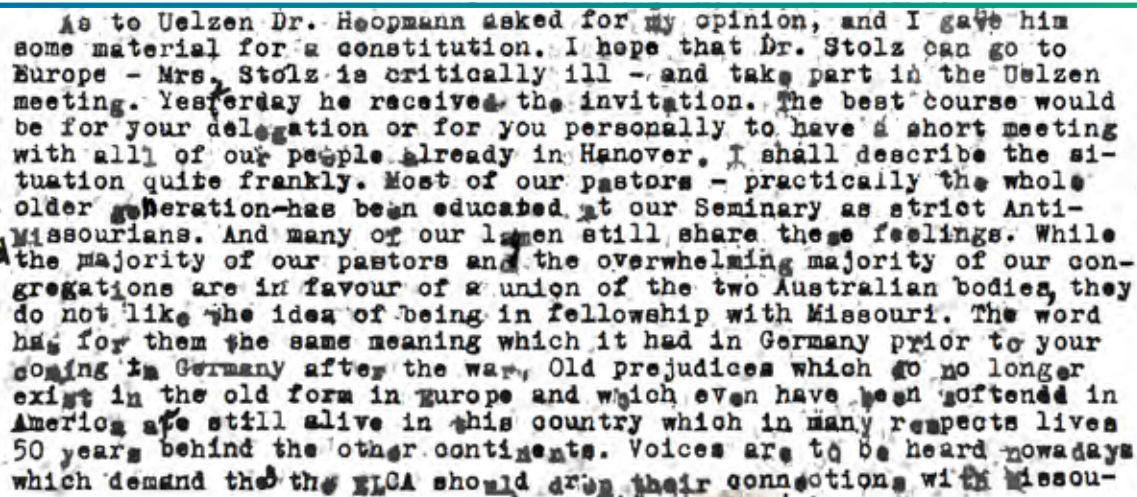
Rev. Albert B. Collver, III, PhD

Greetings to you in the Name of Jesus!

INTRODUCTION

This year the International Lutheran Council celebrates its 25th, silver anniversary. According to the minutes, the International Lutheran “Council” came into existence on 9 September 1993, when 23 Lutheran church leaders from around the world unanimously adopted the “Constitution / Guiding Principles” in Antigua, Guatemala. At this present meeting in Belgium, where the first Lutheran martyrs died, the ILC has 38 members with a number of church bodies requesting membership. Back in 1993 when the ILC was formed, it represented approximately four million Lutherans worldwide. Today in Belgium, the ILC has church leaders in attendance representing around 20 million Lutherans worldwide. In 25 years, much has remained the same about the ILC, particularly the ILC’s commitment to the inspired, inerrant Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and unreserved acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions found in the Book of Concord. Since its beginning, the ILC has desired to increase its capacity so that it could have a greater impact upon World Lutheranism.

Since the 25th International Conference of the ILC held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 24–27 September 2015, the ILC Executive Committee, per the actions that conference mandated, has been working to increase the capacity of the ILC. The theme of the previous conference was “Bringing the Reformation to the World.” The delegates at the past conference recognized that there the events running up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation presented opportunities to have a huge impact on world Lutheranism. Recent developments among the Lutheran churches in the West, such as the acceptance of same-sex marriage, the ordination of practicing homosexual clergy persons, and the continued departure from the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and from the Lutheran Confessions, has prompted great angst among the Lutheran churches of the Global South. Churches in the global South who are troubled by these unfortunate developments are exploring if the ILC can be a welcome home for them. Other church bodies in the West, who have been persecuted for not conforming to the views of Western society, likewise are seeking refuge in the ILC. In order to help the ILC meet these opportunities to increase the ILC’s capacity, the Executive Committee along with the Executive Secretary took some of the following actions: incorporation of the ILC as a non-profit corporation, creation of new bylaws in the spirit of the 1993, “Constitution / Guiding Principles,” (which were not written as a legal document), and the establishment of the Lutheran Leadership Development Program (LLDP), establishing a physical office, and bringing on some staff to assist. These are some of the most significant developments for the ILC since its founding as a “Council.” This report provides a review the history of the ILC for its 25th anniversary.



As to Uelzen Dr. Hoopmann asked for my opinion, and I gave him some material for a constitution. I hope that Dr. Stolz can go to Europe - Mrs. Stolz is critically ill - and take part in the Uelzen meeting. Yesterday he received the invitation. The best course would be for your delegation or for you personally to have a short meeting with all of our people already in Hanover. I shall describe the situation quite frankly. Most of our pastors - practically the whole older generation - has been educated at our Seminary as strict Anti-Missourians. And many of our laity still share these feelings. While the majority of our pastors and the overwhelming majority of our congregations are in favour of a union of the two Australian bodies, they do not like the idea of being in fellowship with Missouri. The word has for them the same meaning which it had in Germany prior to your coming to Germany after the war. Old prejudices which go no longer exist in the old form in Europe and which even have been softened in America are still alive in this country which in many respects lives 50 years behind the other continents. Voices are to be heard nowadays which demand that the GLCA should drop their connections with Missou-

A letter from Dr. Herman Sasse to Dr. Behnken, June 6, 1952.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Although the ILC is celebrating its silver anniversary in 2018, the roots of the ILC go back much further and involved several name changes. The idea for an organization similar to the ILC goes back even further as a way to draw church bodies and territorial churches into an organization that could help support one another to remain Lutheran in the face of unionism. At least in the territories that would become modern day Germany, after the Religious Peace of Augsburg 1555, the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (“whoever’s realm it is, it is his religion”) was adopted as law. The result of this law was that the religion of the ruler was the religion of the territory. Eventually, this led to the created a large number of territorial churches in the German lands. Each territorial church body would have its own agenda and liturgy, and after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), either a Reformed or Lutheran Confession. In 1817, Frederick William III of Prussia merged the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his territory into one administrative unit. Eventually, a common agenda, church order, and liturgy were produced for the union of Reformed and Lutheran churches. Particularly onerous to those who practiced “exclusive Lutheranism,” that is, those who wanted to confess that the Scriptures were the Word of God and an unreserved acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions, was the alteration of the Words of Institution in the liturgy to reflect a Reformed understanding (a symbolic or spiritual interpretation of the Lord’s Supper). The Prussian Union was a line of demarcation between what would become “inclusive Lutheranism” and “exclusive Lutheranism.” Inclusive Lutheranism sought bring churches together with differing confessions (such as Reformed and Lutheran) provided that the “gospel was preached” and the “sacraments were administered” according to an abstract interpretation of Augsburg Confession, Article VII. This form of inclusive Lutheranism would become the dominant motif in what would become the Lutheran World Federation founded in 1947. In Germany those, who held to an “exclusive” form of Lutheranism called themselves Old Lutherans, and they resisted efforts of unionizing the Lutheran church. The Old Lutherans contributed to the formation of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, and also contributed to the Franconian and Saxon migrations to the United States and the 1847 formation of the church later known as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Both SELK and the

LCMS presently are members of the ILC. In the intervening years between the Prussian Union in 1817 and the formation of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947, the Old Lutherans, those who practice exclusive Lutheranism in both Europe and the Americas sought ways to encourage, strengthen, and promote confessional Lutheranism.

One such group that formed in Germany was the *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Konferenz* (The General Evangelical Lutheran Conference, hereafter AELK or *Konferenz*), which held its first meeting in July 1868. Herman Sasse notes the importance of this conference. He writes, “To preserve Lutheranism, the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference was organized on 1–2 July 1868, and since Scandinavian theologians also joined this Conference, it must be regarded as the beginning of the ecumenical movement in world Lutheranism.”¹

In the context of union sweeping the German territories, the church was subjected to the growing nationalist movement. The ultimate goal was one German nation with one church. In many ways the union was as much of a political movement as it was a religious movement. The relationship of the church and state has been tenuous since the beginning of the Constantine era in A.D. 313 when Constantine I issued the Edict of Milan allowing Christians to worship without penalty. The A.D. 380 decree *Cunctos populos* of Theodosius I further created a Christian state church. The Prussian Union of 1817 and the subsequent unions in the German territories commingled the political realm with the churchly realm. Many Lutherans opposed to the union did not view the influx of political power as favorable or helpful to the church. The *Konferenz* was formed in part to address these challenges to the church.

Adolf von Harleß, with Theodor Kliefoth and others, was a founder of the *Konferenz*. Both of the essays that these men presented at this seminal conference can be found translated into English in the ILC World Conference book. Both von Harleß and Kliefoth knew the Missouri Synod and were acquainted with C.F.W. Walther. In 1851 Walther called Dr. Harleß a “superior man” with whom he agreed on almost every point. He also indicated that “the German Lutheran Church needs the assistance of the healthy blooming American Church, and vice

1 Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 13.

versa.”² At the 1868 AELK meeting, Adolf von Harleß stated the need for this sort of encouragement among churches as secular politics were infiltrating the church and he calls for a new thing to preserve the old:

What we want to do, however, should be something that has the entire purpose of serving the adverse situation and the needs of our church. We could think of nothing more reprehensible and disdainful than to use the Church and churchly goals as an excuse to construct a mask and a cloak for outlandish machinations and movements. Above all else, the Church must never be muddled with anything political. Whatever has to do with the state and the governments of this world, that does not involve us here. Whatever has to do with the Lord and His Church, that alone must remain dear to us and must be and remain the subject of our deliberations here. Thus, you should not only speak words, but also faithfully act according to them thereafter.

If we want to have a new situation, then at least we have to “make something new.” Because primarily we want to retain something that is **old**, and simply say that it has also come alive currently. Yet we neither want nor have the ability to **make** it so. All kinds of making [in such fashion] are reprehensible, but nothing can be more reprehensible and hurtful to congregations than [to do so] on the floor of the Church. Yet the internal unity that binds all living members of the Church together is not something that is new; rather, it is something from of old. And when we experience something new, thus the seriousness and the adversity of the times move us not just to remain seated within territorial nooks and perhaps to weep alone, or perhaps to care and try to accomplish things all by oneself — no, rather widely to lend a hand in order to mutually strengthen each other and let ourselves be strengthened, and in both common prayer

2 C.F.W. Walther, “The Trip Report of the Visit of Walther and Wyneken to Germany in 1851,” *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod’s Great Era of Unity and Growth*, translated by Rachel Mumme, 19–106. (Wylie, Texas: Lutheran Legacy, 2009), 27. “In Dresden we were heartily welcomed by Herr Dr. [Adolf Gottlieb Christian von] Harleß [1806–1879], this superior man (well-known High Court preacher and vice president of the Royal Consistory of Saxony). He received us as brothers and expressly stated that our American Lutheran Church with her teaching and practice (within our Synod) was a great joy to his heart. We found ourselves completely unified in every point that was brought up. He shared our innermost feeling and explained to us — and he had already indicated as much to others in Germany — that the German Lutheran Church needs the assistance of the healthy blooming American Church, and vice versa.”

and common work to serve not only ourselves by also Him, who knowingly wishes to lay into the hands of faithfully bound brothers the service of His kingdom.³

Adolf von Harleß also captures the idea to create something new that would bring together Lutheran churches that desire to preserve the “old” confession of faith in a new environment. This first Lutheran ecumenical event desired to encourage, support, and bear witness — not unlike the goals of the International Lutheran Council. Some of the descendants of those who came out of the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference are with us in the ILC today.

Theodor Kliefoth,⁴ a cofounder of the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference and acquaintance of C.F.W. Walther,⁵ gave a presentation on the Augsburg Confession, Article VII. Dr. Sasse notes, “At the first session, Kliefoth delivered his famous address on the subject, ‘What does the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession require with reference to the polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?’ In the course of this address he declared that it is contrary to the confessional standard

3 *Die Allgemeine Lutherische Conferenz in Hannover.* (Hanover: Carl Meyer, 1868), 26–27. Translation by Charles P. Schaum. “Was wir aber wollen, daß soll lediglich unserer Kirche, ihrer Noth und ihrem Bedürfniß dienen. Nichts dünkt uns verwerflicher und verächtlicher, als Kirche und kirchliche Zwecke vorschreiben, um dies zur Maske und zum Deckmantel fremdartiger Hintergedanken und Bestrebungen zu machen. Vor Allem muß Kirche und das, was Politik heißt, unverworfen bleiben. Was des Staates und der Reiche dieser Welt ist, geht uns hier nichts an. Was des Herrn und seiner Kirche ist, das allein muß uns am Herzen liegen und hier Gegenstand unserer Berathungen sein und bleiben. Also lassen Sie nicht blos sagen, sondern danach gewissenhaft thun. Wenn wir nun ein Neues wollen, so wollen wir am wenigsten „ein Neues machen.“ Denn vor allen wollen wir ein altes Gut halten, und nur sorgen, daß es neu lebendig werde. Das aber wollen und können nicht wir machen. Alle Macherei ist verwerflich; nirgend aber verwerflicher und gemeinschädlicher, als auf dem Boden der Kirche. Die innere Einheit aber, welche alle lebendigen Glieder der Kirche verbindet, ist kein neues, sondern ein altes Gut. Und wenn wir ein Neues erleben, so wirkt dies der Ernst und die Noth der Zeit, die uns drängt, nicht in territorialen Winkeln sitzen zu bleiben und vereinzelt sei es zu weinen, sei es zu sorgen und zu schaffen, sondern weithin die Hände auszustrecken, um uns gegenseitig zu stärken und stärken zu lassen und in gemeinsamem Gebet und in gemeinsamer Arbeit uns und Dem zu dienen, der seines Reiches Dienst in die Hände treuerbundener Brüder gelegt wissen will.”

4 See Conser, Walther H. *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866.* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 82-96.

5 C.F.W. Walther, “The Trip Report of the Visit of Walther and Wyneken to Germany in 1851,” 100. “According to an invitation that we had received, we visited Dr. Kliefoth again the next day, when we mostly spoke with him about topics regarding church governance [Kirchenregiment] and church order [Kirchenordnung]. We also received a great deal of insight about many points in this area, where, as is generally known, Dr. Kliefoth has rendered some fine work.”

for Lutheran congregations and pastors to be subject to a Union church government.”⁶ In his essay, Kliefoth argues against a unionistic church government and says that nothing can conflict with the proper administration of Word and Sacrament. Church government must agree with the doctrine of the proper administering of the Word and the Sacraments. Note that Kliefoth does not simply say the word must be preached but and the Sacraments administered but that there is agreement in doctrine about that. The following quotation touches on these themes and mentions the Missouri Synod (showing some of the connectedness that existed already in 1868):

Thus we would indeed have Article VII of the Augustana against us were we to require — what we never once have done — that church government must have the same form at all times and in all places, as if, for example, we were not to recognize as being in the same church as we are the Missouri Synod, which has a presbyterial form of government, or the Swedish church, which has an episcopal form — although they agree with us in the administration of Word and Sacrament. Against [the claims of our opponents] Article VII does not stand against us, but for us when we desire (which we do anyway) that the government of Lutheran churches, whatever form it may have, consent to what the Lutheran Church has said about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Our churches should not be dismembered under another church government that is involved with a different doctrine than what is set forth purely in the Augsburg Confession.⁷

Although Kliefoth was speaking about the context of territorial churches being subsumed under a union church government, the value that he articulates about doctrinal agreement set forth purely in the Augsburg

Confession is central to the ILC’s position that churches come together over agreement in doctrine. Kliefoth also mentions the Missouri Synod, one of the founding members of the ILC, in this passage. Next we turn to the Missouri Synod and developments in the United States.

Just four years after the 1868 organization of the *Konferenz* in Hanover, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America was formed on 10–16 July 1872.⁸ Originally, six synods in North America founded the Synodical Conference.

The Synodical Conference intentionally integrated doctrinal integrity and mission work. It accepted the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, constituting the Book of Concord of 1580, as the correct exposition of the Word of God. The Synodical Conference sought to be an expression of unity among the synods accepting its position, provided mutual encouragement in faith and confession, and promoted unity. Its ultimate purpose was to unite all Lutheran synods of America into one orthodox American Lutheran Church. At its peak, the Synodical Conference was the largest Lutheran body in North America. However, it remained a federation of independent synods united by a common faith and confession, never achieving its goal of organic unity. . . . The Synodical Conference officially dissolved in 1967 over doctrinal disagreements regarding church fellowship, after the Evangelical Lutheran Synod suspended fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1955 and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod suspended fellowship in 1961. . . . After the dissolution of the Synodical Conference in 1967, the founding church bodies ELS and WELS, and the LCMS, each formed their own separate international conferences. The ELS and WELS formed the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in 1993, with 24 member church bodies as of 2016. The LCMS formed the International Lutheran Council in 1993, with 38 member church bodies as of 2016.⁹

As will be seen below, the members of the Synodical Conference were instrumental in forming the predecessor bodies to the ILC. Both the Confessional Evangelical

6 Sasse, *Here I Stand*, 13.

7 *Die Allgemeine Lutherische Conferenz in Hannover*. (Hanover: Carl Meyer, 1868), 35–36. Translation by Charles P. Schaum. “Und mithin würden wir den Art. VII. der Augustana allerdings gegen uns haben, wenn wir, was wir aber niemals gethan haben, sondern wollten, daß daß Regiment der Kirche immer und allenthalben gleiche Gestalt haben müsse, wenn wir z. B. die Missourisynode, weil sie ein presbyteriales Regiment hat, oder die schwedische Kirche, weil sie episcopale Formen hat, nicht für mit uns einige Kirche erkennen wollten, obgleich sie in Verwaltung des Worts und Sacraments mit uns übereinstimmen. Dagegen haben wir den Art. VII. nicht gegen, sondern für uns, wenn wir, was wir allerdings thun, begehren, daß daß Regiment lutherischer Kirchen, welcher Gestalt es auch sei, de doctrina evangelii et administratione sacramentorum mit der lutherischen Kirche consetire, daß unsere Kirchen nicht unter eine Kirchenleitung dismembriert werden, die einer anderen als der in der Augsburgischen Confession verfaßten reinen Lehre zugethan ist.”

8 Albert B. Collver, “Synodical Conference,” *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*, edited by Mark A. Lamport (New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 743–44.

9 *Ibid.*

Lutheran Conference (CELC) and the ILC can claim to be successor bodies of sorts to the Synodical Conference.

THE 20TH CENTURY ORIGINS OF THE ILC¹⁰

The origins of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) can be traced, like the Lutheran World Federation, to the end of World War II. After World War II, great efforts were made by the Lutheran churches to help German refugees and people who had belonged to German Lutheran churches. The Missouri Synod was no exception to this trend. During this reconstruction period, the Lutheran World Federation contributed about \$45 million, while the Missouri Synod contributed about \$20–25 million in aid.¹¹ Although the Missouri Synod sent an observer to the founding of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947, the Missouri Synod sent a large delegation to the 1952 World Assembly in Hanover. Immediately following the World Assembly in Hanover, the Missouri Synod held a meeting in the ancient Hanseatic city of Uelzen, Germany, from 6–10 August 1952. The delegates consisted of the mission churches of the Missouri Synod and a number of free churches for a total of 160 attendees. The pastors came from North America, Brazil, Germany, Finland, Denmark, England and Australia. All of these church bodies were in altar and pulpit fellowship with one another.¹² The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was invited to attend the meeting in Uelzen but declined to avoid causing embarrassment to the Missouri

Synod if they needed to disagree with the discussion.¹³ By this time, the strains within the Synodical Conference were apparent, mostly due to the Missouri Synod's departure from longstanding positions on membership in the Boy Scouts, prayer fellowship, and discussions with the American Lutheran Church (ALC).¹⁴

The agenda for the first meeting of what would become the International Lutheran Council was titled, "The Program of the meeting of the faithful Lutheran churches of the world."¹⁵ Major papers included "Koinonia" by Dr. Bretscher of St. Louis, "The doctrine of the Church in its relationship to true ecumenism" by Dr. Schulz of Berlin, "Discussion on our relationship to the Lutheran World Federation: An Opinion of the churches represented by the churches of Uelzen" by Dr. Hoopmann and Dr. Meyer, "The common legacy of the Lutherans according to the three Solas" by Professor Franzmann of St. Louis. In addition to the papers, the churches held Divine Service and discussions on fellowship practice in various world areas by the attendees. The meeting concluded by making "the unanimous recommendation to the Churches not to join the L.W.F. as long as the L.W.F. in its Executive and member churches does not de facto make the Confessions of the Lutheran Church the Norma Normata of the Church,"¹⁶ and that "we appoint a committee which shall investigate the question whether it is advisable and possible to enter into a relationship (i.e., co-operation) with the Lutheran Federation without giving up our Lutheran

10 Albert B. Collver, "A Brief Status of Worldwide Lutheranism at the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation," *Logia* XXVII, no. 3 (2018): 5–14.

11 Clarence Peters, "The Minutes of the Meeting of the Delegates of the Missouri Synod in the Konferenz-Local of the R.R. Station Hanover" (Hanover: The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, 1952), 5. These minutes came from the LCMS, *Office of the President Records, John W. Behnken Administration, 1935–1962*, f. 284, held by Concordia Historical Institute. "Dr. L. Meyer estimated that our people contributed 20–25 million dollars. Dr. Petersen emphasized that the Missouri Synod was the first to help. All the churches in Germany know this as do the people throughout Germany. They will never forget this."

12 Cl. E. Hoopmann, "Report on the L.W.F. Assembly Hanover: July 24–August 3 1952." (Adelaide, Australia, 1952), 10. This report came from the LCMS, *Office of the President Records, John W. Behnken Administration, 1935–1962*, f. 284, held by Concordia Historical Institute.

13 Clarence Peters, "The Minutes of the Meeting of the Delegates of the Missouri Synod in the Konferenz-Local of the R.R. Station Hanover," 8. "Dr. Behnken stated that we are the hosts at Uelzen. Invitations were sent to the Wisconsin, Slovak, Norwegian Synods, the Free Churches in Germany, Alsace, France, England. The Wisconsin Synod will not be present, because they said they might have to disagree with us and that would be embarrassing." President Mark Schroeder of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (2007-present) pointed out that even during this time of tension among the members of the Synodical Conference, the members still demonstrated care for one another by not causing public embarrassment or humiliation.

14 See Braun, Mark E. *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri*. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003).

15 "Programm der Tagung der treulutherischen Kirchen der Welt in Uelzen/Hann. Vom 6.-10. August 1952." This agenda came from the LCMS, *Office of the President Records, John W. Behnken Administration, 1935–1962*, f. 284, held by Concordia Historical Institute.

16 Cl. E. Hoopmann, "Report on the L.W.F. Assembly Hanover," 12.

principles.”¹⁷ Several concerns about the LWF emerged: 1) no doctrinal unity in the LWF, and 2) No confessional consistency for admission. Hoopmann made the following observation about this first meeting of what would become the International Lutheran Council, “The delegates at Hannover [sic] represented more than 40 million Lutherans. Those at Uelzen scarcely 3 million. We are in the minority. We stand alone; but as the men who after mature deliberation signed the Formula of Concord did so as men who desired to appear before the judgment seat of Christ with intrepid hearts, thus we are also mindful of our responsibility to God and all Christendom and of the fact that we have vowed ‘that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to our Confessions, but by the help of God’s grace we intend to abide thereby’.”¹⁸

In his 1956 President’s Report, Behnken reported that these conferences in Europe, especially among the Free Churches have afforded “opportunities to exert a real influence for Scriptural Lutheranism. . . . Some great theologians, not of our Synod, have stated that our Synod and those in fellowship, are the last hope of true Lutheranism. Many are praying most fervently for us.”¹⁹ Other conferences were held in 1959 in Oakland, California, and in 1963 in Cambridge, England, where the name “International Lutheran Theological Conference” was adopted. When the International Lutheran Theological Conference met in Frankfurt in 1966, the theme focused on the nature of the church, its marks, and what constituted fellowship.²⁰ The conference further discussed the nature of the LWF, and whether it could be joined without compromise to the truth. “The view strongly held by some that the LWF by virtue of its confessional paragraph and its churchly purpose was ‘church’ in the sense of the New Testament and that therefore membership in it involves

a confessional loyal church in denial of the truth of the Gospel.”²¹ The meeting concluded with no one recommending membership in the LWF. In 1993, the “International Lutheran Theological Conference” was re-constituted as the International Lutheran Council.

THE ILC FROM 1993 – 2015

In the subsequent years after the 1952 meeting in Uelzen, Germany, the group that became the International Lutheran Council changed its name a total of three times and held 15 conferences. After the 1952 meeting, the group became known as the International Lutheran Theological Conference.²² At the November 3–7, 1975, International Lutheran Theological Conference meeting, the group changed its name to the International Lutheran Conference.²³ In 1983, the Missouri Synod in its 55th convention was promoting the International Lutheran Conference and encouraging the president of the Missouri Synod to bring greetings to the ILC member church at its next conference.²⁴

The 1989 meeting of the International Lutheran Conference took place in Seoul, Korea. This conference was held in conjunction with a Theological Convocation made up of leaders and theologians from ILC church bodies. The results of this convocation were presented by the Association of Confessional Lutheran Seminaries (a newly formed organization of the seminaries of ILC church bodies in 1980) to the ILC at its next conference in 1991 in Hong Kong. This report included the proposal that “because of the importance of Theological Education for all of our ILC churches and the problems we face in providing adequate training for our pastors and church workers,” the ILC “include ACLS concerns” in its ongoing programs.²⁵ There was general consensus at the Hong Kong conference that the ILC should be strengthened in order to make it more effective “in fulfilling its purpose

17 Martin H. Franzmann, “Missouri and the Lutheran World Federation,” *Lutheran Witness*, 4, 13–14. (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, April 14, 1953): 14. “The committee appointed consisted of the presidents of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, of three German Free Churches, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, and of the Lutheran Free Church of France (the last to represent the other churches of Europe in fellowship with us), and this committee was authorized, in the event that the churches approve its recommendations, to carry on preparatory negotiations with the Executive Committee of the LWF.” This committee appoint in Uelzen became the first executive committee of the ILC.

18 Hoopmann, 12–13.

19 John William Behnken, “President’s Triennial Report,” *Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 6–17. (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1956) 13.

20 Hans Kirsten, “International Lutheran Theological Conference,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38, no. 9 (October 1967): 615–16.

21 *Ibid.*, 615.

22 The International Lutheran Theological Conference met: 1) 1952 Uelzen, Germany; 2) 1959 Oakland, USA; 3) 1963 Cambridge, England; 4) 1966 Frankfurt, Germany; 5) 1968 Cambridge, England; 6) 1970 Saint Louis, USA; 7) 1973 Madras, India; 8) 1975 Porto Alegre, Brazil.

23 The International Lutheran Conference met: 1) 1978 Papua New Guinea; 2) 1981 Saint Louis, USA; 3) 1984 Obot Idim, Nigeria; 4) 1987 Berlin, Germany; 5) 1989 Seoul, South Korea; 6) 1991 Hong Kong; 7) 1993 Antigua, Guatemala.

24 “To Recognize and Encourage the International Lutheran Conference.” In *Him We Proclaim: Convention Proceedings 55th Regular Convention The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 137–38. (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1983).

25 Arnold Rakow, *Minutes of the “14th Consultation off the International Lutheran Conference held in Hong Kong, October 4-13, 1991,”* 9.

as a forum for sharing information, needs and problems, and for giving mutual support and sharing resources.”²⁶ There was also consensus that “in order to fulfill its purpose” the ILC needed staff assistance.

Following the 14th ILC meeting in Hong Kong, the ILC Continuation Committee appointed a committee consisting of Ralph Bohlmann (LCMS), Edwin Lehman (LC-Samuel Nafzger (LCMS), and Jobst Schoene, Chairman (SELK) to prepare a concrete proposal by the International Lutheran Conference for consideration by the Conference at its next meeting. This report was discussed and adopted as amended in 1993, thereby bringing into existence the ILC as a Council of confessional Lutheran church bodies.²⁷

The 1991 International Lutheran Conference meeting in Hong Kong decided that the ILC needed to change. The minutes report, “The ILC assume a more formal structure to allow for more continuity between meetings. The ILC desired to become an association of church bodies, not just a meeting of church body chairman, bishops or presidents. Missions and theology were to be the center of the new proposed document. It was felt that a position of General Secretariat was needed in order to strengthen the administration and continuation of the ILC’s work between conferences.”²⁸ The minutes indicate that the ILC members while generally supportive of this direction, wrestled with what an association of church bodies would mean. The membership as a whole did not want the “association of church bodies” to be a communion or fellowship involving altar and pulpit fellowship and the costs associated with a full time position for administration.²⁹ The group did have a general consensus that it was time to increase the activity of the ILC. The new guidelines and constitution were adopted after a number of changes including the elimination of the General Secretariat. This document, while not a legal document, has served as the basis for the ILC for nearly 25 years. The last meeting of the International Lutheran Conference was held in Antigua, Guatemala, on 4–11 September 1993, and the first meeting of the Internation-

al Lutheran Council was held in Adelaide, Australia, on 23–30 September 1995.³⁰

The newly constituted Executive Committee of the International Lutheran Council, at its first meeting in Winnipeg, Canada in January 1994, took a number of significant actions, including the following. It was decided that Dr. Nafzger, the Executive Director of the LCMS’ CTCR be asked to provide part time staff services for the Council, pending approval of the LCMS Board of Directors, and that he be “referred to as Executive Secretary of the ILC.” It was also decided that a four page publication presenting basic information three or four times a year be initiated, that it be produced in English, that its target audience be the membership of ILC churches, but also shared with a much broader audience around the world, and that Dr. Edwin Lehman, President of Lutheran Church-Canada and the first Chairman of the Council, be asked to serve as editor of this publication to be called ILC NEWS.

The ILC, at its 1997 conference in St. Louis, received a proposal from the Association of Confessional Lutheran Seminaries, which had been organized in 1980, that the ACLS be reconstituted under the umbrella of the ILC. The ILC Executive Committee, in response to this request, appointed a Seminary Relations Committee to prepare a proposal as to how this might be done. This proposal of the Seminary Relations Committee was officially approved by the ILC at its next meeting held in Cambridge, England in August 1999.³¹

The next major change in the structure occurred at the ILC’s 2007 conference in Ghana. This conference had a number of resolutions that changed the structure of the ILC as well as provided guidelines for membership into the ILC. The ILC task force and executive committee issued their report which made a number of recommendations for the future of the ILC. The first resolution recommended that the basic structure and goals of the ILC remain as it has been since 1993 (and even before), namely:

The International Lutheran Council is an organization of its member church bodies which enables

26 Ibid., 10.

27 Dr. Samuel Nafzger, former ILC Executive Secretary, provided valuable insight into aspects of the ILC during this period.

28 Alvin L. Barry, “Minutes of the 15th Consultation of the International Lutheran Conference” (Antigua, Guatemala, 1993) 4.

29 Ibid. “Significant concerns were raised in regard to the meaning of altar and pulpit fellowship as well as issues in regard to the administrative cost of the ILC and the establishment of a General Secretariat position.”

30 The International Lutheran Council has met: 1) 1995 Adelaide, Australia; 2) 1997 Saint Louis, USA; 3) 1999 Cambridge, England; 4) 2001 Warburg, South Africa; 5) 2003 Foz do Iguacu, Brazil; 6) 2005 Berlin, Germany; 7) 2007 Accra, Ghana; 8) 2009 Seoul, South Korea; 9) 2012 Niagara, Canada; 10) 2015 Buenos Aires, Argentina; 11) 2018 Antwerp, Belgium.

31 Karl Fry, *Minutes of ILC meeting in Cambridge, England, August 1999*, 8-9.

them, through their authorized representatives, to share information, study theological questions and concerns together, issue statements when asked to do so by its members (e.g., in addressing contemporary questions facing the church), discuss effective and coordinated means of carrying out the mission and ministry of the church, nurture and strengthen their relationships with each other, and work toward the closest possible joint expression of their faith and confession.³²

The conference decided to keep the intention and basic goals of the ILC the same. However, it also voted to increase the capacity of the ILC in several areas. The ILC voted to develop a budget and financing model based on the membership of the church body and the Gross Domestic Product of member church bodies' country. It voted on staffing the Executive Secretary position and the production of an ILC newsletter.³³ The ILC created a three year cycle: first year – the ILC World Conference, second year – the ILC World Seminaries' Conference, and third year – ILC Regional Conferences. The ILC adopted a definition of "established church." This definition required an established church to be a legal entity within its country, to have a constitution, to be governing and not be a mission of another church body.³⁴ The delegates adopted a resolution designating St. Louis, MO, as the official archive for the ILC.³⁵ The ILC passed a resolution encouraging member church bodies to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, while acknowledging some members for historical or political reasons may be members of the Lutheran World Federation.³⁶ The ILC effectively voted to allow dual membership in the ILC and the LWF. This especially was necessary as the ILC had pending membership requests from LWF member church bodies, and needed to make the change in order to admit them into membership. The ILC also officially stated that the discussions between the ILC and the LWF which began in 2003 should continue on a regular basis.³⁷ It would be accurate to say that the 2007 ILC World Conference introduced more changes and capac-

ity building initiatives to the ILC than had ever before been seen in its history.³⁸

THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL 2015–2018

The ILC's 2015 conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 24–27 September 2015 was noteworthy for several reasons. The conference had the theme of "Bringing the Reformation to the World."³⁹ For the first time, the ILC had representatives from the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT). This brought the total number of people represented at an ILC conference to around 20 million people (ILC members, plus Ethiopia and Tanzania). The ILC admitted three new members for a total of 38 member churches in 2015.⁴⁰ The executive committee provided updates on the ILC dialogs with the Roman Catholic Church through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCP-CU) and with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). For the first time recorded in the minutes, the ILC presented a strategic plan for expanding capacity to impact world Lutheranism, including a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat analysis. "Matthew Harrison expressed the hope to advance the ILC to a next level."⁴¹ The ILC executive committee was tasked with developing proposals for staffing, financing, and the location of an ILC office.⁴² The ILC executive committee took seriously the mandate given by the 25th ILC World Conference and began work to implement the desires of the ILC to have a greater impact on World Lutheranism.

32 Reginald Quirk, "Minutes of the Meeting of the International Lutheran Council," *International Conference XXII* (Accra, Ghana: International Lutheran Council, 2007), 3.

33 Ibid., 6–11.

34 Ibid., 13.

35 Ibid., 14.

36 Ibid., 15.

37 Ibid., 27.

38 In 2011, Rev. Albert B. Collver, Ph.D., was selected to be the ILC Executive Secretary by the Executive Committee after the ILC World Assembly held in Niagara, Canada.

39 Gijsbertus van Hattem, "Minutes of the 25th (10th) Conference of the INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL," *Bringing the Reformation to the World, Conference of the International Lutheran Council* (Buenos Aires: International Lutheran Council, 2015).

40 Ibid., 7. "The chairman welcomed the three churches in the fellowship of the ILC. Vsevolod Lytkin, Bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Marvin Donaire, President of the Lutheran Church Synod of Nicaragua and Torkild Masvie, Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Norway expressed their happiness and gratitude. With the acceptance of this three churches the ILC now has 38 member churches."

41 Ibid., 4.

42 Ibid., 9. The ILC executive committee was tasked with developing "concrete Proposals to strength the Reach of the ILC containing also specific Recommendations on Staffing and Financing and Location to achieve this."

Over the past three years, the ILC's executive committee decided that in order for the ILC to "go to the next level," it needed to transition from an informal organization to a legally incorporated entity. The executive committee began working to convert the ILC's "Guidelines and Constitution" into legal bylaws. An attorney was hired who assisted in the preparation of bylaws based upon the "Guidelines and Constitution" adding the necessary structure for a legal organization. On 29 August 2017, the ILC became the International Lutheran Council, Inc. The corporation was registered in the State of Delaware in the United States of America. The corporation, echoing the "Guidelines and Constitution" from 1993, exists for six purposes: "1. To further a united witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthen its member churches in preaching the Gospel to the entire world; 2. To further united diaconic action through intentional acts and programs of mercy in response to human need and suffering; 3. To further theological study and the formation of qualified, orthodox, Lutheran pastors; 4. To further peace and unity by mediating member disputes; 5. To engage in other charitable activities determined by the Board of Directors; and 6. To engage in any and all lawful activities incidental to the forgoing purposes for which a corporation may be organized under the General Corporation Law of the State of Delaware, except as restricted herein or in the bylaws of the corporation." After the incorporation of the ILC, the executive committee applied for tax exempt status with the US Government. The ILC Bylaws state that a condition for full, regular, voting membership includes: subscription to the Canonical books of the Bible as "the inspired and infallible Word of God and are the source and norm of doctrine and practice." It also requires that members accept "the historic confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 are true statements that accord with the Word of God." The ILC Bylaws also state, "The Holy Scriptures not only guide doctrine but the life and morals of the Church. The Holy Scriptures and the Decalogue are binding upon the life of the Christian." Finally, due to the times we find ourselves in, the ILC Bylaws specify three categories of membership: 1. Full, regular, voting members (this is the same as in the ILC's "Guidelines and Constitution from 1993); 2. Associate members (also the same as the ILC's 1993 Constitution); 3. Others, which includes observers, recognized organizations (such as mission societies), and individuals. The incorporation of the ILC in 2017 with legal bylaws moves the ILC into an

organization for the 21st century that can have a greater impact on world Lutheranism.

Along with the incorporation of the ILC, the executive committee took action to open bank accounts in the name of the ILC. Prior to this, all ILC funding and expenses were dependent upon the gracious assistance of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The executive committee took the step of opening an office at Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. The ILC also has begun a few projects such as sponsoring a missionary pastor in Nigeria, assistance to the seminary of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, Concordia Israel, and the Lutheran Leadership Development Program, which is being carried out with its first cohort in February 2019 in Wittenberg, Germany, with the partnership of Concordia Publishing House and Concordia Theological Seminary. Presently, the ILC executive committee is working on staffing for communications and fund raising. All of these activities will help the ILC achieve a greater impact on world Lutheranism in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The International Lutheran Council has a tradition going back 150 years with roots in the *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Konferenz* (The General Evangelical Lutheran Conference) of 1868. The ILC has members today from the descendants of the AELK 1868 conference as well as members from the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. The ILC began as an informal organization 66 years ago after the Lutheran World Federations world assembly in Hanover in 1952, as the International Lutheran Theological Conference. In the late 1970s, the ILC became the International Lutheran Conference. And today in 2018, we celebrate the 25th anniversary since the ILC became the International Theological Council and its one year anniversary as a legally, incorporated entity. The ILC has come a long way since its humble beginnings and is now poised to have a huge impact on world Lutheranism in the 21st century. For all of this, the ILC owes everything to the grace of God and is in need of his continued blessing. In 2018, the ILC is poised through its member churches to represent over 8 million Lutherans worldwide, with the potential to grow much more in the coming years. In its 150 year tradition, the ILC has represented unwavering subscription to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The ILC bears witness to the truth of God's word in a world that greatly needs the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. Lutherans from around the world have become interested in the ILC because of its commitment to the Scriptures and to Lutheran identity. Now is one of the brightest moments and greatest potential for the ILC in her history.

In closing, please hear again the words spoken at what would be the first meeting of the ILC in 1952: “We are in the minority. We stand alone; but as the men who after mature deliberation signed the Formula of Concord did so as men who desired to appear before the judgment seat of Christ with intrepid hearts, thus we are also mindful of our responsibility to God and all Christendom and of the fact that we have vowed ‘that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to our Confessions, but by the help of God’s grace we intend to abide thereby.’”⁴³ Thank you.

43 Hoopmann, 12–13.