

**TOGETHER**

December 6, 2016

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."

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."

## 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 



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## Conference highlights multi-site strategy

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A recent conference highlighted a rising strategy for expanding mission work—multi-site ministry, in which a congregation carries out gospel ministry at more than one physical location.

“More and more congregations as they’re looking to find new places and reach more people with the gospel are considering a multi-site ministry as a viable option,” says Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. “It allows them to establish a new spot and reach new communities that otherwise they wouldn’t think of doing.”

A growing number of WELS congregations are using this approach to expand their gospel outreach, and five of the eight new mission starts authorized by Home Missions in 2016 are multi-site ministries.

Divine Peace in Garland, Texas, was one of those congregations that received funding. Rev. John Hering, pastor at Divine Peace, says that three years ago the congregation noticed a community across the lake (about 20 minutes away) growing by 160 new families a month. Six families in the congregation already lived in that area. “We saw the opportunity,” says Hering. “We started dreaming and thinking, but we really didn’t know what it would look like.”

When the 180-member congregation applied for funding to call a second pastor, it was just learning about multi-site ministries. Gunnar Ledermann,

a 2016 graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., was assigned to serve as Divine Peace’s second pastor and help establish its second site.

Right away Ledermann noticed the benefits of having one congregation with multiple sites, including built-in congregational leadership, structure, volunteers, and shared resources.

“It allowed me to come in and not have to worry about these things because they were already taken care of,” he says. “It has freed me up to meet people . . . and allowed both of us to do more evangelism work at both locations because we are one congregation.”

Yet Divine Peace still had questions. “We had a ministry plan in place and we have been laying groundwork, but it was the multi-site conference that helped us connect all the dots,” says Hering. Ten people from that congregation attended the WELS Multi-Site Conference, held Nov. 14–16 at Grace, a multi-site congregation with four locations in Benson, Sahuarita, Tucson, and Vail, Arizona. The conference was made possible by an Antioch II grant.

Conference workshop topics focused on key multi-site components including communication, staffing, volunteers, budget and finances, merging two or more congregations, and organizational structure. Attendees also had a chance to hear firsthand from others at all different stages in multi-site ministry. “We didn’t want information to come from a book,” says Rev. Daron Lindemann, chairman of the conference planning committee and pastor at Holy Word,

a multi-site church in Austin and Pflugerville, Texas. “[Attendees] had a chance to rub elbows with about 50 churches represented by 144 people and hear the stories of multi-site churches.”

The conference also gave attendees time to process what they’ve learned and start making plans about how to incorporate it into their ministries. “We wanted to help people clarify and crystallize what [multi-site ministry] involves so that they can go into it thoughtfully,” says Lindemann.

Hering says the conference answered his congregation’s questions and offered different suggestions of ways to minister to multiple locations as one congregation. “We’re trying to remain appropriately flexible in both locations while at the same time make use of the gifts people have on both campuses,” says Hering. “It helps the congregation stay united in their vision, seeing that they are doing outreach as a whole rather than dividing up between locations.”

Though Divine Peace has been having worship services in Rockwall since March, it held its grand opening for the community Dec. 4.

According to Uhlhorn, while establishing multi-site ministries is popular right now, it is not replacing the traditional new starts authorized by Home Missions. He does, however, see advantages. “It’s a new mission, but it’s also got some real live partners that are working every day together to spread the gospel in new places.”


For more information about multi-site ministry, contact conference planning committee members, Rev. Nathan

Strutz, [pastorstrutz@rlcverona.com](mailto:pastorstrutz@rlcverona.com), or Rev. Peter Kruschel, [peter.kruschel@wels.net](mailto:peter.kruschel@wels.net). Learn more about home mission opportunities at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions). 

## Family fun at WELS Day at the Bucks

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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.

To view photos from the event, visit [wels.net/together](http://wels.net/together). 

## Confessional Lutheranism in Europe

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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