

Intersynodical meetings continue

On Nov. 28-30, representatives from the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) met in Jacksonville, Fla., for the sixth annual meeting for informal discussions. The main topics covered were the Doctrine of the Call and a comparative review of the recently published catechisms by WELS and the LCMS. The last version of the catechism for the ELS (2001) also was used in discussing the new editions of the explanations to the Small Catechism. In this 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation we especially treasure the work of Dr. Martin Luther in composing his Small and Large Catechisms of 1529.

The three synod presidents provided updates on the respective work of their church bodies. Challenges and blessings also were noted in respect to pastoral training, the filling of congregational vacancies, and the relationships with international churches. The LCMS is part of the ILC (International Lutheran Conference), while the ELS and WELS are members of the CELC (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference).

None of the participants at these informal meetings anticipate a restoration of church fellowship between ELS/WELS and the LCMS in the near future. Yet, the sessions themselves were once again helpful as areas of agreement, as well as specific differences, were addressed in a cordial but candid manner. The representatives of the three synods have decided to gather once again in the fall of 2018.

Also in November, representatives of WELS and the ELS met with counterparts from the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). The CLC was formed in the 1950s when a number of congregations left the Wisconsin Synod because they believed that the synod was not acting quickly enough to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The meeting was a continuation of formal doctrinal discussions intended to determine if fellowship between the synods can be restored.

In 2015 the group had composed a document entitled “A Joint Statement on the Termination of Fellowship.” Agreement on this joint statement is seen as a necessary first step in the doctrinal discussions. The ELS convention approved the statement in 2016; the WELS convention approved it last summer. The CLC convention discussed it and

recommended further study by its pastoral conferences. The CLC will consider the statement again at its next convention.

Even if the Joint Statement is adopted by all three synods, other issues remain to be more fully discussed and resolved before fellowship can be reestablished. We pray for God's blessings on these efforts to establish fellowship based on a full agreement in doctrine.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 


New director of discipleship joins Congregational Services

Encouraging and equipping congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry."

That's how Rev. Donn Dobberstein describes his new position as the director of discipleship for WELS' Congregational Services. In this new role, Dobberstein will serve the WELS Commissions on Adult Discipleship and Youth and Family Ministry. These commissions coordinate WELS Women's Ministry, the Interactive Faith online Bible study series, marriage enrichment programs, the biennial international youth rally, the *Kids Connection* video series, and other ministry resources.

Dobberstein is not a stranger to Congregational Services, having served as the chairman of the Commission on Evangelism for the past 10 years. He also says, "Twenty-two years in parish mission settings have given me ministry experiences showing the importance of and the connection between 'making disciples' and 'continuing to disciple.' Evangelism and nurture are not at odds with each other but are complementary."

Dobberstein served as pastor at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla., for the past 17 years. He and his wife, Beth, moved from Port Orange to the Milwaukee, Wis., area in November as he began his work at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis. The couple have four children, two of whom still live at home.

Dobberstein clearly feels a sense of urgency for this ministry. He notes, "After years of the position being 'dormant,' clarifying a sense of direction and vision will be a priority. Evaluating and prioritizing resources needed for WELS congregations will help us set goals for the next five years. My intention is to listen and learn, support and serve my fellow coworkers and God's people. I believe God has given us a unique moment in his kingdom that can be seized that, God-willing, can lead to ministry activity." 

Celebrating 20 years of Hispanic outreach in Phoenix

On Nov. 25, Santo Tomas, Phoenix, Ariz., celebrated its 20th anniversary. This Spanish-speaking mission congregation averages four baptisms per month and has confirmed more than 18 adults and 13 youth this year. Each month, the congregation welcomes an average of 23 first-time visitors.


"Friendship evangelism is a key part of our growth as family ties and trust form an important bond," says Rev. Tom Zimdars, one of Santo Tomas's two pastors. "Most of our members enter the congregation via special celebrations like baptisms, weddings, and quinceañeras."

Zimdars notes that as visitors encounter the gospel, "they receive the joy and peace of knowing that their sins are forgiven through faith in Christ, and this message continues to work in their lives as they grow in their faith and share their faith with their family and friends."

Santo Tomas was formed in 1997 by St. Thomas, an English-speaking congregation that saw the growing Latino community and need for a Spanish-speaking ministry. Santo Tomas now has 169 communicants and 360 baptized members. In addition to Zimdars, the congregation has a second pastor, Rev. Frank Cossio, who was born

in Cuba. WELS Home Missions and WELS Church Extension Fund help support this cross-cultural mission.

"We want to thank the Lord as he has richly blessed Santo Tomas during the past 20 years to reach countless souls with the precious gospel message of free and full salvation through faith in Jesus Christ," says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions.

More than 220 people attended Santo Tomas's anniversary celebration, which included a special bilingual worship service, a fellowship meal, and traditional Mexican music sung and performed by the congregation's members. 

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