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STAND

66TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

The WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR)



Mission

WELS Constitution 4.10

“There shall be a Commission on Inter-Church Relations that shall serve under the Conference of Presidents by representing the synod in doctrinal discussions with other church bodies who are, or are not, in fellowship with the synod in order to ‘extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,’ (Constitution, Article IV). It shall also keep itself informed on the doctrinal trends in other church bodies.”

Objectives

1. To preserve and strengthen—on the basis of complete unity in scriptural doctrine and practice—the bond of confessional fellowship with those church bodies with which such fellowship already exists.
2. To extend the bond of confessional fellowship with other church bodies where complete unity in scriptural doctrine and practice becomes apparent.
3. To extend the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church by offering testimony and assistance—outside of fellowship—to groups which show a desire to grow in their understanding of Scripture doctrine and practice.

Objectives

4. To keep itself informed on doctrinal trends as they become evident in the church at large.
5. To formulate doctrinal statements needed for dealing with other church bodies and, upon request, to address other doctrinal issues.

First Beginnings

- The Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union (Union Committee)
- 1938 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) resolution accepting Missouri's "Brief Statement" and the American Lutheran Church's "Declaration"
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty + Conference of Presidents
- Made a standing committee by the '41 convention

Commission on Doctrinal Matters/ Commission on Inter-Church Relations

- 1959—the Commission on Doctrinal Matters (CDM)
- Makeup
 - 5 parish pastors
 - 3 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professors
 - 2 professors from other synodical schools
- Appointed by President
- 1973—Commission on Inter-Church Relations (clarify & distinguish)

Chapter 1: 1939-1961

- Maintaining a scriptural, confessional position toward other Lutheran bodies, especially in its Synodical Conference relationship and in taking proper and necessary confessional action
- Foci: Scripture & Church Fellowship

Chapter 2: 1961-1968

- In WELS: a full understanding of the synod's confessional position and action and appreciation for it
- Free Conferences: “to provide pastors and laymen who are concerned about an uncompromising confession of doctrines currently being jeopardized in the Lutheran Church a forum for mutual strengthening with the ultimate objective to obtain full unity in doctrine and practice”

Chapter 3: 1968-1988

- Strengthen WELS' fellowship relations
 - Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS): discussions on the real presence, adoption of parallel statements, ongoing discussions into the '90s, & WELS/ELS Forum 1967
- Clarify them with Lutheran bodies
 - Successful: ELFK
 - Unsuccessful: SELK, Bekenntniskirche, FELSiSa, LuKiSA, LCA, CLC, LCR, LC-MS, ELC-SFB

Chapter 3: 1968-1988

- Establish fellowship relations where possible
 - Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL) in 1971/1973
 - Lutheran Confessional Church Scandinavia in 1974/1975
 - Lutheran Church of Cameroon in 1975

Chapter 4: 1988-2000

- Ongoing contact with Lutheran bodies, groups, and individuals concerned about Lutheran confessionalism in doctrine and practice
- LC-MS convention observers and occasional informal meetings with LC-MS officials
- Meetings with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) Board of Doctrine (1987-1990)—Joint Statement on the Termination of Fellowship between Church Bodies but rejected by CLC BoD
- Establishment of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (1986-1993)
- *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS* (1997) and revision of *This We Believe* (1999)

Chapter 5: 2000-2007

- Declarations of fellowship
 - All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria (2001)
 - Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia (2001)
 - Ukrainian Lutheran Church (2001)
 - Gereja Lutheran Indonesia (2003)
 - Lutheran Church of Portugal (2007)

Chapter 5: 2000-2007

- How to maintain adequate contact & offer meaningful encouragement to an increasing number of confessional Lutheran church bodies in the world?
 - CICR Contact Men: Scandinavia, Germany, Latvia, Ukraine
- Contact with break-off groups from ELCA & LC-MS

Chapter 6: 2008-2019

- Increasing overlap between CICR & Board for World Missions (BWM)
 - Ongoing money, manpower, counsel, or a springboard = BWM
 - Self-governing, self-supporting, self-disciplining = CICR
- Declaration of fellowship with Puerto Rico (2010), SALEM, Ethiopia, East Asia (2017), Taiwan, & Kenya (2019)
- CICR Contact Man for Portugal, Puerto Rico, & Japan

Chapter 6: 2008-2019

- Regular informal talks begin between WELS/ELS and LC-MS (2012)
- Formal doctrinal discussions with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (2015)
- CICR liaison to each BWM Administrative Committee
- CICR Administrator (2019)
- CICR Toolkit for Inquiring Churches

Chapter 7: 2020-

- Increasing cooperation with BWM One Teams (Ethiopia, Kenya, Puerto Rico, Portugal)
- Full integration into all BWM One Teams
 - CICR representative(s) as active member(s) of all One Teams
 - One Teams oversee maintenance of relationships with all sister churches outside U.S., reporting to CICR & BWM
 - The end of the CICR Contact Man program
 - Expenditures from CICR support funds through One Teams
 - CICR special concern for doctrine and practice
 - CICR retains responsibility of representing the WELS in doctrinal discussions and recommending churches for fellowship

Chapter 7: 2020-

- CICR continues to meet bi-annually
 - Review all relationships, both inside and outside the U.S.
 - ELS, ELS Doctrine Committee, ELS/WELS Forum
 - Formal & informal discussions with other church bodies
 - CLC, LC-MS
 - Review doctrinal statements and recommend fellowship
 - Represent WELS in doctrinal discussions & forums
 - Periodical reading