

LCMS recognizes relationships with six church bodies

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Representatives of partner churches are presented to the convention. From left to right, they are the Rev. André Müller (Lutheran Church of Uruguay), the Rev. Airton Schroeder (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil), Bishop Alexander Burtsev (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Almaty and the District of Almaty — Republic of Kazakhstan), the Rev. Alexander Streltsov (Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church), the Rev. Tatsumi Yoshida (Japan Lutheran Church), President Adalberto Hiller (Portuguese Evangelical Lutheran Church), Bishop Arri Kugappi (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia), Bishop Amos Boley (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia) and the Rev. Dr. Albert Collver (LCMS). (LCMS/Frank Kohn)

By Tony Oliphant

MILWAUKEE (July 11, 2016) – The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention on Monday formally recognized and endorsed official relationships with six church bodies in Europe, South America, Central America and Asia.

In accordance with Synod bylaws, the delegates endorsed altar and pulpit fellowship with the Lutheran Church in Norway (LCN) and the Lutheran Church of Uruguay (LCU).

Fellowship with the Lutheran Church in Norway had already been declared by LCMS President Matthew Harrison on Nov. 7, 2015, after consultation with the Praesidium.

Bishop Torkild Masvie of the church in Norway expressed his gratitude and hope for future cooperation.

“We are very small,” Masvie said. “If you are small, you need big brothers. We need to draw on your theological expertise and

education system.”

He spoke of what the LCN could offer the LCMS.

“We are where you are going, into that darkness,” Masvie continued. “Perhaps some of what we find out will be of help for you one day. We can show some courage in the darkness so that we can mutually be an inspiration for each other.”

The Rev. Dr. Albert Collver, LCMS director of Church Relations, also expressed excitement at the prospect of cooperative future work with the LCN.

“This church stands out as a beacon in Norway to proclaim the Gospel,” Collver said. “There are a number of groups in Norway with which the Missouri Synod potentially will be able to enter fellowship in the future. This church helps show us the way and expands our work in Scandinavia.”

Altar and pulpit fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Uruguay was first recommended by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) on Dec. 11, 2015, and formally declared by Harrison Jan. 6. The convention’s action endorsed the fellowship.



Bishop Torkild Masvie of the Lutheran Church in Norway addresses delegates and attendees to the 2016 LCMS Convention on Monday, July 11, at the Wisconsin Center in downtown Milwaukee. (LCMS/Michael Schuermann)

Making use of a translator, Rev. André Luiz Müller, principal pastor for the LCU, described how important this fellowship is for his small, emerging church body.

“Uruguay is a small country with a small population; one of the most secular countries in the world,” he said. “Because of this, our relationship with you is very important.”

Future work with this church body has the promise of yielding great fruit, as Collver explained.

“One very significant result of our partnership with the Lutheran Church of Uruguay is that we will work in partnership with them to establish a Spanish Lutheran university, which may well be the first of its kind in the world,” he said.

Resolutions 5-03, 5-04 and 5-05 were combined in a motion from the floor to formally recognize the Iglesia Luterana en Guatemala, the Iglesia Luterana de Venezuela and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Almaty and the District of Almaty — Republic of Kazakhstan (ELC-RK) together as self-governing partner churches. That official designation indicates that these church bodies were originally mission plants by the LCMS and have now become self-sufficient.

“I’m incredibly pleased that the synod in convention has voted to enter fellowship and to recognize churches as being self-governing,” Collver added. “It’s a great joy when fellowship is recognized between church bodies. It demonstrates a great amount of trust in the process and the work we’re doing of working with Lutheran churches and identifying those with the same confession we have.”

The delegates also recognized the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Chile (IELCHI) as a partner church. As with the previous designations, this indicates that a church body shares the same doctrine and commitment to the Holy Scriptures and The Book of Concord as the LCMS. The IELCHI — as a daughter church body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina, another partner church of the LCMS — requested that the LCMS recognize it as a partner church because of this agreement in doctrine and practice.

The work of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) also was affirmed and encouraged by the delegates. As explained in the preamble of this resolution, “The ILC is proving to be a popular refuge for confessional Lutheran churches worldwide that seek to maintain their biblical and confessional identity, teaching, and practice within the context of a global Lutheran community that has few such forums” (Res. 5-07).

As such a forum, the ILC is showing itself to be very important to confessional Lutherans throughout the world.

“Now is the moment for the International Lutheran Council and for the Missouri Synod,” said Collver, who also serves as executive secretary of the ILC. “We have Lutheran churches from around the world — and even some non-Lutheran churches, such as the Anglicans in south Sudan — who are seeking our confession and to be part of how we talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“We have tremendous opportunity in these coming days,” Collver continued. “Churches are seeking the ILC because of their view on the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. It’s a tremendous opportunity. We’re incredibly thankful that the Missouri Synod has supported the ILC for all of these years. We’re thankful for the confidence they’ve shown us, and we’re looking forward to engaging even more churches in the next three years. We think that perhaps our membership might grow by another 15 churches in three or four years.”

Archbishop Christian Ekong of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria said of church bodies constituting the ILC: “We’re one big family of Lutherans through the confession of Christ.”

The Rev. Tony Oliphant is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Elmhurst, Ill.

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