

# ELS Newsletter



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## Informal Discussions with the LCMS

The WELS and ELS representatives met with LCMS representatives for its 12th gathering outside the framework of fellowship. We met in Jacksonville, FL on Dec. 4 & 5. The three ELS representatives were Pres. Obenberger, Vice President Michael Smith, and Rev. Thomas Rank (chairman of our Doctrine Committee). Once again it was a fraternally cordial meeting. All participants acknowledged that formal talks are not imminent and very likely will not happen in our lifetimes, at least among the eldest in this group of participants. However, benefits of regularly meeting continue to be recognized, whether in cooperating in externals, finding common cause among enemies of American Confessional Lutheranism, understanding some of the variety of churchly practices that exist among us, etc. A more complete accounting of this meeting will be forthcoming.

## Cooperating in Externals

While not compromising our fellowship principles, there are times we can work together with other church bodies outside our fellowship for a common cause that affects us all. Here is a case in point: The Minnesota legislature created a new definition of gender identity for the non-discrimination law, they did not also clarify that the existing exemption for religious associations and faith-based schools also applied. Formerly, the statute had a definition of sexual orientation that included gender identity discrimination. When a new definition of gender identity was created this past year, the exemption/accommodation should have also been amended but was not. On behalf of the ELS this past summer, I cosigned the letter sent to the Minnesota legislators authored by the Minnesota Catholic Conference outlining the problem and asking for remediation. Pres. Pfeifer also signed on behalf of our Bethany Lutheran College.

## Upcoming Events

January 4 – Mission Advancement Project Board of Directors  
January 5 – Synod Review Committee  
January 15–16 – Board for Youth Outreach  
February 1 – Committee for Archives and History  
February 6–7 – Board of Trustees  
February 9 – Planning & Coordinating Committee  
February 13 – Board for Christian Service



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January 2024

Dear Members and Friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod,

Recently I came across this quote attributed to Winston Churchill: "Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is."

It reminded me also of this quote from an ELS devotional book based on Ps. 73: "We do not expect to see truth and justice prevail in the present course of this world. We know very well that lying will prosper, adorn itself with the name of truth, and trod the saints underfoot as enemies of happiness." (*Book of Family Prayer*, by N. J. Laache, p. 403.)

You may have become jaded in the past on account of hearing others telling you that what you are hearing is truth from them but in the end is falsehood. They may be politicians, relatives struggling with addiction, even spokespersons from so-called "Christian" churches. Do not become cynical as you enter this new year. There is still the source of absolute truth upon which you can continue not only to rely, but trust with eternal benefits.

Jesus said: "If you hold to My teachings ... you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (Jn. 8:32) Jesus' truth is incontrovertible AND powerful to save. The truth that God loves you unconditionally in His Son, whom He sent to save you, truly sets you free from the burden and work of the Law. Your sins have all been paid for through His blood and the holiness required of you has been produced for and credited to you. Enter this New Year trusting that you can rely absolutely on Jesus' truth and are benefitted everlasting. You are forgiven and declared righteous before God forever.

A blessed New Year to you and your dear ones in Jesus' name!

Glenn Obenberger

## Installation

Rev. Andrew Soule (pictured middle row, center) was installed as pastor at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota on Sunday, December 10. Pastor Luke Ulrich served as the liturgist, Rev. Craig Ferkenstad preached the sermon, and Circuit Visitor Aaron Ferkenstad performed the rite of installation.



*Pictured (L to R): Gaylin Schmeling, Donald Moldstad, Theodore Gullixson, Shawn Stafford, John Petersen, Timothy Schmeling, Kyle Madson, Aaron Ferkenstad, Thomas Kuster, Andrew Soule, Micah Plocher behind Craig Ferkenstad, Luke Ulrich, Ben Wiechmann, Marques Nelson, Ken Mellon, Ronald Pederson, David Jay Webber, Brian Klebig, Bernt Tweit*

## Our College

The faculty and staff of Bethany Lutheran College wish the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod a blessed Christmas and New Year in our Lord and Savior. We invite your prayers in 2024 for Bethany's continued ability to focus on engaging students with the precious Gospel Message of Jesus as our Savior from sin and death. From the chapel and classrooms, to the residential halls and co-curricular venues, Bethany's mission is to meet the needs of a college education in today's complicated world while remaining rooted in our mission of the "One Thing Needful."

View the Bethany Christmas video at  
<https://youtu.be/I6YDGtcdC10?si=pvOxsxZKOPXqPITK>

## Christian Life Resources:

Lisa and I had the privilege of attending the 40th Anniversary of Christian Life Resources (CLR) on Oct. 14 in Jackson, Wisconsin. We heard well qualified and interesting speakers regarding: Pro-Life in a "Post-Roe" America; Embracing authentic compassion for our fellow human beings instead of the misguided "compassion" of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide; and the modern-day slavery and sex trafficking that is proliferating in our American society.

The highlight for us was when Rev. Jonathan Hein spoke on the topic of "The Moral Climate and the Need for the Gospel." Here is a summary of his presentation:

*The term "moral climate" is used in reference to the implicit and explicit values of a group that determines if that group categorizes various behaviors as good or bad. In the past generation, the moral climate in America has vastly shifted. Instead of looking at this as the tragic collapse of American culture, Christians will see this as the greatest opportunity for gospel proclamation in a century.*

Rev. Hein's presentation touched on a main component of the 2024 ELS Synod Convention essay by Pastor James Braun (June 16–20). His words were encouraging to us as we continue to seek to serve our Lord and His kingdom in this life.

These presentations are now available:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/uynA-rlCO2w?feature=shared&t=4144>

Rev. Hein's presentation begins at about the 1:10:00 point on the video.

(We also heard about their name change some years ago from "WELS Lutherans for Life" to "CLR." It was done to expand their sphere of concern, e.g., providing support to unwed mothers like "New Beginnings: A Home for Mothers," [homeformothers.com](http://homeformothers.com). But a humorous anecdote was also shared indicating a name change was needed after an older gentleman attended one of the events thinking it was for lifelong members of WELS, not quite, hence CLR.)

## WELS Task Force on Human Sexuality and Gender Issues

Pr. Gregory Lyon (WELS), the Wisconsin Lutheran College campus pastor, chairs the WELS task force on human sexuality and gender issues. Pastor Gene Lilienthal (ELS) is the president's contact person in this regard, so that we might alert our ELS pastors, members, principals, teachers, parents, etc. of items that should periodically be highlighted among us for our edification.