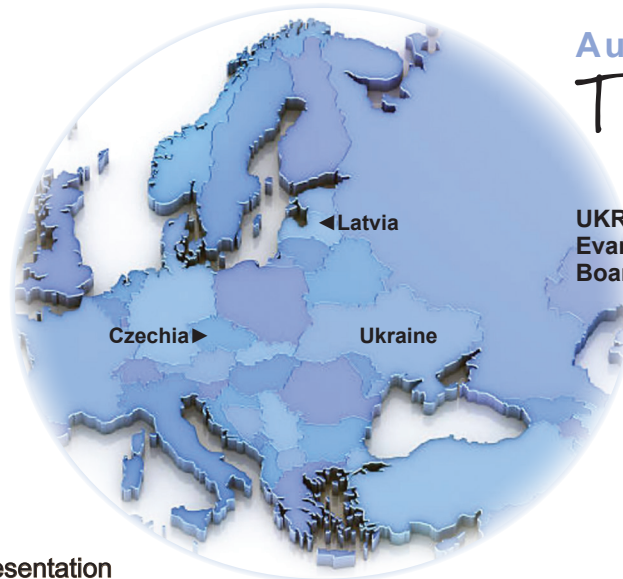


August 2026

Thoughts of Faith

UKRAINE | CZECHIA | LATVIA
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Board for World Outreach



FROM THE ELS

Thanks to Thomas Heyn

Rev. Jay Webber

ELS World Outreach Administrator

As a part of the Board for World Outreach presentation during the recent convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod—on June 24—BWO chairman Rev. Daniel Ruiz, with some appropriate remarks, offered thanks to Rev. Thomas A. Heyn for his 9 years of service as World Outreach Administrator, until his retirement at the end of 2025. A “Certificate of Appreciation” was presented to Heyn, which read:

“This certificate of appreciation is presented to Rev. Thomas A. Heyn by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Board for World Outreach in grateful recognition of his nine years of faithful service to the synod, to the churches and missions with which the synod works, and to the Lord of the Church, as World Outreach Administrator. ‘His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”’ (Matthew 25:21).”

In my written report to the convention, I also said this:

“I wish to thank my predecessor, Rev. Thomas Heyn, for his nine years of service as World Outreach Administrator, and for his assistance in my transition to this position. I have seen the great affection in which he is held by the pastors and members of the churches served by the BWO, as they have wished him well in his retirement, and as they have thanked him for all he has done for them on our synod’s behalf through these years. We likewise wish him well and thank him.” ■

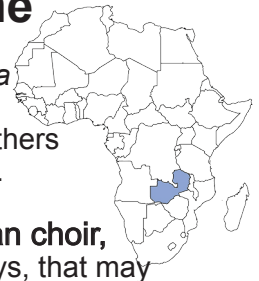


A Gathering in Lusaka

Confessional Lutherans Meet in Africa for the First Time

Rev. Dr. Uģis Sildegs

Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia



“How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).

It was the smiling faces of a Zambian choir, returning again and again over four days, that may stay longest in the memory. They sang for a fellowship that had never before assembled where it now stood—for the first time since the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) began in 1993, the worldwide confessional Lutheran family had come together on African soil. The setting was the M’Kango (“Lion”) Golfview Hotel in Lusaka, Zambia, from 29 May to 1 June 2026, with our Zambian sister church, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA), as host.

More than twenty
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and guests...Many
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one confession.

More than twenty nations sent delegates and guests, a striking breadth for so small a communion: from Albania, Portugal, Germany, Finland, Sweden and Latvia in Europe; from Puerto Rico and the United States across the Atlantic; from Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh in Asia; and from the host continent itself — Ethiopia, Uganda, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Congo, Tanzania — alongside Australia. **Many peoples, many tongues, one confession.** Among them, Latvia was represented this year by a notable group: pastors Uldis Fandjevs with his wife Rita, Ivo Sildegs and Uģis Sildegs, together with Juris Matvejs

continued on next page

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and his wife Gunta. This was the largest Latvian delegation ever to attend a CELC convention, and it was a quiet encouragement to see a witness from Latvia taking its place in the wider communion.

That communion is still growing. Three churches were received as new members during the meeting—the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of Kenya, Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional in Latin America, and the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda—bringing CELC membership to well over thirty churches. Much of the work of the days of the gathering belonged to the lecture hall and the discussion that followed, but the worship, the devotions, and the unhurried conversation around the table mattered no less. In the business sessions, Thomas P. Nass of the Wisconsin Synod was thanked for his long and faithful service as CELC president and Nathan Seiltz, also of WELS, was elected to succeed him. To ease the burden of what remains a voluntary office, a part-time Communications Manager position was created as a three-year trial.

If one lecture spoke most directly to where the church now finds itself, it was David Kamwata's, on Holy Baptism. Kamwata, who teaches at the LCCA seminary, set the sacrament against the realities of his own continent—a Christianity growing fast amid Pentecostal-charismatic fervor, prosperity preaching, and an abiding fear of spiritual powers. Against the urge to rest faith on the strength of one's own decision, he pointed to

the steadier ground of baptism, where the saving word runs from God to us rather than from us to God. When feelings dim and doubt presses in, the believer need not ask whether the conversion was sincere enough, but may say instead that God has placed His name on him. And where curses and ancestral spirits are feared, baptism is no mere symbol and no magic charm, but Christ's own act of claiming and guarding His people. Indeed, it is the place where the decisive victory has already been won.

The Sunday offered a different rhythm. After worship in a local Lusaka congregation and lunch at the LCCA theological seminary, the afternoon opened out into the Chaminuka Reserve. There we came close to the lions—even sharing in their feeding—and watched a beautiful variety of African wildlife pass before us, before the day eased into good food, local cheeses and wine, and unhurried conversation. All of it was the sweeter for the company: brethren from across the world, at rest together. Plans now turn toward Mequon, Wisconsin, where the next world meeting is hoped for in 2029. But the lasting gift was simpler than any plan. Stirred and strengthened by this worldwide fellowship, we returned home to take up again the service to which God has called each of us, wherever He has placed us. ■



▲ Golfview Hotel in Lusaka, Zambia



▲ Rev. Webber with the delegation from Latvia



▲ D. Ombogo, E. Gwachi, J. Kempfert, J. Webber, K. Gollapalli, A. Stiller



▲ 2026 CELC convention participants

Gift of Life Ukraine Ministry UPDATE

Dmytro Maksymenko, GoL Director

The war in Ukraine continues to bring profound suffering to families and communities across the country. Missile and drone attacks remain a daily reality in many regions. In recent months, Kyiv has endured especially severe strikes, resulting in the destruction of residential buildings, loss of civilian life, and ongoing fear among the population. Many families are forced to spend nights in shelters, living with uncertainty and the grief that has become a part of everyday existence.

These circumstances deeply affect not only those we serve but also our own staff. Two of Gift of Life Ukraine's counseling centers are located in Kyiv, and our colleagues there continue their ministry under intense emotional and psychological strain. Regular communication reveals the depth of this burden—exhaustion from sleepless nights, anxiety for loved ones, and the ongoing stress of repeated air raid alarms. At times, conversations give way to silence and tears as team members process the realities they are living through.

Despite all challenges, our ministries remain active and fully operational. The School of Motherhood continues to serve expectant mothers from across Ukraine, including many from frontline regions and displaced families. In a time marked by instability and fear, this ministry offers both practical education and human care. Women receive instruction on pregnancy, childbirth, newborn care, and family well-being. They are also invited to participate in Bible studies led by pastors of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, where they are encouraged and strengthened through the Word of God. Upon completion of the program, each participant receives a Bible together with essential hygiene kits for mother and child. These gifts provide meaningful practical support, especially in a time when many families struggle

even to secure basic necessities. At the same time, they serve as a tangible reminder of dignity, care, and Christian love extended through the global Church.

Across our counseling centers, individuals and families continue to seek humanitarian, psychosocial, and spiritual support. Many arrive carrying the heavy burdens of displacement, trauma, economic hardship, and family difficulties. In response, we offer Christian coaching



▲ pregnant mother with New Testament and Small Catechism conversations as a simple form of structured encouragement and attentive listening. In the Lutheran understanding, such support does not replace pastoral care or preaching but can serve as a practical expression of neighborly love—helping people reflect, regain direction, and respond responsibly to life's challenges while remaining grounded in hope.

Our pro-life ministry among young people continues to be an important part of our outreach. Through educational meetings in schools, universities, and community settings, we seek to affirm the dignity of human life and support young people in thinking carefully about questions of identity, relationships, responsibility, and the value of life from its beginning. In a time of war and demographic crisis, these conversations are especially important, and we strive to approach



▲ School of Motherhood in Kremenets

them with respect, compassion, and clarity. Where appropriate, we also offer personal support and guidance to young people facing difficult life decisions.

Our mobile medical clinics continue to serve as one of the most effective ways of reaching vulnerable populations across Ukraine. We are especially grateful for the installation of new dental units and a modern autoclave sterilization system in our mobile medical buses. This important upgrade was made possible through the generous support of The Antioch Foundation. This new equipment has significantly improved both the quality and safety of our services. It allows our dental teams to work more effectively in field conditions and ensures high standards of infection control and patient care. For many people in rural areas, displaced communities, and war-affected regions, these mobile clinics remain the only accessible source of professional dental treatment. Strengthening this capacity directly translates into better care for those who are most in need.

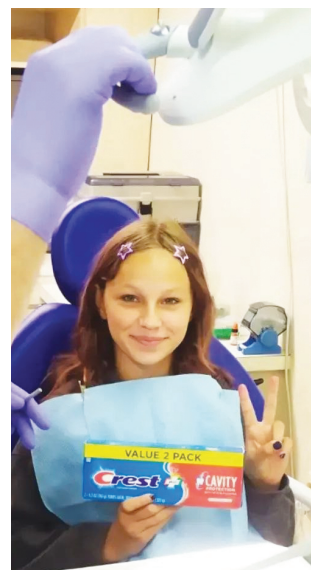
Our recent medical outreach has included service to children with developmental disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, and other special needs, as well as orphaned and displaced children evacuated from conflict-affected regions. Providing care to these children is a profound privilege for our team. Alongside medical treatment, we also provide hygiene supplies, small gifts, and children's Bibles whenever possible, offering both practical help and a message of hope rooted in God's care. We also continue to serve internally displaced persons and remote communities, including isolated mountain villages where access to healthcare is extremely limited.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Madison, Wisconsin), Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and



▲ medical rehabilitation facility for children in Uzhhorod

School (Madison, Wisconsin), as well as Kerry Laper and Nicholas Laper, for their generous donations of toothpaste, toothbrushes, dental floss, and other essential hygiene supplies. These items are distributed to children, displaced families, and vulnerable individuals who often cannot afford even the most basic hygiene products in the current economic reality.



▲ young dental patient

At the center of all our work is the proclamation of the Gospel. Through medical care, counseling support, maternal education, and outreach among young people, we seek to serve the whole person while remaining faithful to the calling of the Church to bear witness to Christ. We understand all our work as a response to God's grace, expressed in acts of mercy, compassion, and service to our neighbor.

We remain deeply grateful for the prayers and support of our partners around the world. Your faithful partnership makes it possible for this ministry to continue bringing help, dignity, and hope to people in Ukraine during this difficult time. ■



▲ Bible class in Ternopil

If you would like to support this work or explore partnership opportunities, please contact us.

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