

September 2026 Mission News

Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Board for World Outreach
*Sharing the Gospel in
South America, Asia, and Africa*



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 2—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.” ■



▲ Rev. Daniel Ruiz and Rev. Thomas Heyn

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of

Kenya

Our New Mission Partner in East Africa

Rev. Jay Webber, ELS World Outreach Administrator

At the June Evangelical Lutheran Synod convention, the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of Kenya [ELDK] was formally adopted as a mission partner of the synod. **Within this new relationship, the ELS Board for World Outreach will be working with the ELDK on an ongoing basis especially in the area of theological education**, with assistance being offered for seminary classes, pastors’ conferences, and special seminars and conferences for various groups of laity.

This specific supportive relationship involving the BWO is new, but the ELDK and its pastors are old friends of the ELS.

Contact with the ELS began in 2015 when a group of Lutheran pastors in the area around Nyamira, Kenya, reached out to our synod. These pastors were formally affiliated with a larger Lutheran church body in Kenya, but they had been ostracized from that group for many years, due to their criticism of various instances of corruption and the misuse of authority. They were now ready to move on from the chaos and controversy to do the work of the church, and asked the ELS to help them.

They informally organized themselves as a church body with a seminary in 2017. In 2023 a constitution was formally adopted, and the ELDK was then legally recognized as an independent church body.

Under the direction and guidance of ELS President John Moldstad, the ELS did assist them over several years, chiefly through sponsoring pastors’ conferences and seminary classes for a cohort of 16 theological students. Those students finished their pastoral training and were ordained in 2020.

A large number of ELS pastors were involved in these special projects, by means of the internet, as volunteer presenters and instructors.



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More recently, Concordia Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, continued to sponsor these and similar activities in Kenya through a special Kenya Education Fund that it had established, to which various other interested congregations and individuals also contributed.

And now, with the resources that the synod makes available to it, the BWO will continue this work, as it intends to sponsor these and similar projects to help our brethren in Kenya to be deepened in their understanding of God's Word, and thereby to be equipped for their mission in bringing the pure gospel of God's forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ to the people of their nation.

Church fellowship between the ELDK and the ELS was formally recognized in 2023, and in May of this year, the ELDK was received into membership in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference at its convention in Lusaka, Zambia. At present, the ELDK has 35 congregations served by 24 ordained pastors, with nine men studying in the seminary.

As Kenya has now become an official mission field of the ELS, we will be reporting in the pages of this publication and in other venues on the work that we do with the ELDK and on the work that the pastors and congregations of the ELDK are doing in their homeland.

They do face continuing challenges. Most of their congregations are in small towns and villages where the members are poor and with little means, so that they are not able to support their pastors adequately if at all. Seminary classes are held and the seminary library is housed in a rented facility because the ELDK cannot afford a building of its own.

The leaders of the ELDK are also enduring harassment and "lawfare" at the hands of certain parties from within their former church body—with frivolous lawsuits and trumped-up charges in the civil courts.

But as God sustains our Kenyan brethren in their faith and in their commitment to the mission that Jesus has entrusted to his church, and as we in the ELS lift them up in prayer and offer our support and encouragement, we know that their efforts for the sake of the gospel will be blessed. What the Apostle Paul said to the Philippians, each of us can and should say to the pastors and members of the ELDK:

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:3-6, ESV). ■



▲ Kenya group ordination 2020



Without a seminary,
how can a synod
train its pastors or
make any plans to
establish mission
congregations?



▲ Kenya baptism



▲ current seminary students' instructor, Christian Eisenbeis



▲ current seminary students' instructor, Paul Webber

The Lutheran Theological Seminary Nyamira, Kenya

Rev. Paul Webber

Concordia Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI

Even before their formal organization as an independent church body, the future leaders and pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of Kenya knew that they needed to establish a seminary. The Word rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered serve as the marks of the church. So too can we say that the ability to provide theological education to future ministers of the gospel is one of the "marks" of a functioning Lutheran synod. **Without a seminary, how can a synod train its pastors or make any plans to establish mission congregations?**

But where could this growing body of likeminded pastors in and near the city of Nyamira, Kenya, find teachers for this new seminary? They themselves did not have advanced theological educations. So, they were forced to look beyond themselves for help in the fulfilling of this wish. And the place where they found that help was in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Under the authorization and direction of the now sainted ELS President John Moldstad, Pastor Jay Webber, with valuable assistance from Pastor Joseph Abrahamson, recruited a group of ELS pastors to begin teaching classes for the new seminary of the ELDK—over the Internet—in 2018. I was one of those pastors.

The Kenyans who were enrolled in the seminary needed a two-year course of study. Normally men study for three years in a seminary, but these men, many years earlier, had already studied for one year in an evangelist training program. Their church needed more fully-trained pastors, however, and these men were now going to be prepared for that higher calling.

There were growing pains in this work, often related to unreliable internet connections, spotty electrical service, the deafening sound of heavy rain on a tin roof during the rainy season, and numerous other challenges that came from trying to teach classes from one side of the world to the other. But God still worked through these efforts to bring that first cohort of students in the ELDK seminary to graduation and ordination in 2020.



At the urging of President Moldstad, the ELS Board for World Outreach funded those first two years of seminary instruction. For the past few years as the seminary in Kenya had started up again with a new cohort of students, this work was supported by a number of ELS congregations and individuals who banded together to sustain it—with Concordia Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in the forefront.

At its most recent convention, the ELS as such voted to take on this work and to adopt Kenya as an official mission field of the synod, so that the BWO will once again be directly involved in these efforts. It is our prayer that, working together as a church body, we can continue to help our fellow Lutherans in Kenya to train up future generations of pastors for the care of God's people and the expansion of his kingdom.

There are currently nine students enrolled in the ELDK seminary. Classes in the seminary are taught in the mornings by Kenyan pastors, and in the evenings by American pastors. Because of an 8-hour time difference between Kenya and the central time zone in the United States, for the students these classes with their ELS instructors are in the evenings, but for the Americans they are first thing in the morning.

Along with helping to provide instruction in the seminary, the ELS also plans to help arrange for theological conferences for pastors—much like the annual general and regional pastors' conferences that ELS clergy find so beneficial. Such conferences have occasionally been held in the past, often with ELS presenters speaking to the gathered Kenyan pastors through an internet connection.

Through the years, a large number of ELS pastors have participated in these educational programs with and for the pastors and future pastors of the ELDK. There is a good chance that your pastor has been one of them. All of these pastors have emerged from the experience with great affection for their Kenyan students and brethren, and with a renewed zeal for world missions.

So, not only has this multi-year project been of help and encouragement to the ELDK, but it has also been of help and encouragement to the ELS. It has contributed toward a revitalization of our commitment to the Lord's great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them..." ■



How Can You Help?

■ Pray for each of the mission fields, for the national pastors of these churches as well as for the members of their congregations who live where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not always welcome. May God work all these challenges for the good of his people as he has promised.

■ Please—prayerfully consider a gift or regular donation for the work in the various fields. Every field, and some more than others, has many needs where God's people can provide much needed assistance.

■ You may designate a gift to a particular field or project on the memo line of a check.

■ To make an online donation you may go to els.org/bwodonations

■ Scan the QR code which will take you to the donation page.



■ For more information, please contact us in the following ways:

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