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Reports on Interchurch Relations

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Reports on Interchurch Relations

FOR The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod the year 1962 brings a number of very significant developments in interchurch relations, some of which will call for crucial decisions.

I

At the conclusion of the last in a series of three meetings involving twenty-one representatives of the National Lutheran Council and fifteen men from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the following report was issued:

Report to the Churches on the Consultations of Representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the National Lutheran Council re Lutheran Cooperation. For the past two years conversations have been going on between representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and of the National Lutheran Council to discuss the issue of Lutheran cooperation. These talks were initiated by the National Lutheran Council, which invited all Lutheran church bodies in the United States to participate. They were occasioned by the fact that after 1962 there will undoubtedly be a streamlining of the Council's structure that it might continue to serve effectively as a joint agency of the newly merged churches (The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America) in the years ahead, which development seemed to afford a unique opportunity for all Lutheran churches in America to re-examine the contemporary possibilities with respect to Lutheran cooperation.

Three major consultations have been held, preceded and interspersed by smaller

meetings of a preparatory nature. At the first consultation papers were read and discussed regarding "The Doctrine of the Gospel," based upon Article VII of the Augsburg Confession. The second consultation dealt with the subject "The Significance of Confessional Subscription"; the third consultation centered upon the question "What Kind of Cooperation Is Possible in View of Discussions to Date?"

Two things became apparent. The papers and the discussions revealed that there are still points of doctrine which require further systematic study. Further, these conversations established the fact that there is a far greater extent of consensus on the subjects discussed than had been generally realized.

At the third consultation, therefore, it was necessary for the groups to evaluate the consensus which had become apparent in order to determine the kind of Lutheran cooperation which might be based upon it. An unstated but active factor in the deliberations was the context of developments in the Lutheran scene in America in recent years. Since differences exist within and among all Lutheran church bodies and associations of Lutheran church bodies, the question had to be faced: On what basis can a positive cooperative Christian witness be made in this country in fulfillment of the full Lutheran evangelical mission without compromising the affirmations or distinctive viewpoints of any of the church bodies involved?

It was the unanimous judgment of all participants in these consultations that the papers and discussions have revealed a consensus on the doctrine of the Gospel and

the meaning of confessional subscription sufficient to justify further exploration regarding the possible establishment of a cooperative agency to replace the National Lutheran Council as presently constituted. The successor agency would have as one of its major functions the continuing of theological studies with the objective of achieving ever greater unity. Therefore it has been agreed that the representatives of the two groups participating in these consultations request their ecclesiastical authorities to submit to the next conventions of the churches involved resolutions which would authorize the appointment of representatives to negotiate with representatives from other Lutheran church bodies in this country regarding a possible future cooperative association of Lutheran churches in America.

This proposal to the churches contemplates that the formal relationships are to be in accord with the following guiding principles:

1. All Lutheran church bodies in the United States are to be invited to participate in the planning and formation of the new association.
2. The new association is to serve as a Lutheran interchurch agency for common theological study and Christian service:
 - a. *Common Theological Study*: the agency is to seek theological consensus in a systematic and continuing way on the basis of the Scriptures and the witness of the Lutheran Confessions.
 - b. *Christian Services*: the agency is to give participating bodies opportunity to work together in the fulfilling of their responsibility of

Christian service in functions to be specified in the constitution and bylaws of the agency.

3. a. The establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship and organic unions shall be outside the sphere of the agency and formal steps toward these objectives shall be left to the initiative and decision of the church bodies concerned;
- b. Except for theological studies, each participating body shall have the option of declining cooperation in individual activities of the agency;
- c. Cooperation in the several activities carried on by the agency is to be limited to the participating bodies. Exceptions may be made only by unanimous consent of the participating bodies of the agency.
4. Participating bodies shall be free to enter into or continue relationships outside this agency.

The participants in the consultations have prayed for the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit and thank God for the fact that the conversations have been fruitful. They have also prayed that God will direct any future steps in order that our beloved Lutheran church in this country may be found sensitive to Christ's voice and obedient to His will.

This report to the churches was unanimously approved in a meeting held in Chicago on Reformation Day and All Saints Day, 1961.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod was represented by the following: John W. Behnken, George J. Beto, H. J. A. Bouman, Arnold C. Erxleben, Martin H. Franzmann, A. O. Fuerbringer, George J. Meyer, Elmer J. F. Moeller, Theodore F. Nickel, Arthur

C. Nitz, Roland P. Wiederaenders, George W. Wittmer, W. F. Wolbrecht, Oliver R. Harms, and L. B. Meyer.

This report will be presented to the conventions of all the churches represented in the discussions and, if adopted, will lead to the invitation to all Lutheran church bodies, which the report mentions. From the standpoint of a Missouri Synod participant in the meeting, it appears that this is a serious attempt to realize the theological discussions for which we have often asked. God willing, it may bring us nearer to Walther's ideal of unity, without compromise in doctrine, among all Lutherans in America than was granted to our Synod during Walther's lifetime.

The proposal will come to the convention of the Missouri Synod through the channel of its committee on doctrinal unity. It should be given careful study beforehand and conscientiously considered at Cleveland in June.

II

A second momentous development relates to meetings involving Lutherans and Presbyterians. The news release by the National Lutheran Council reads:

A Presbyterian proposal to engage in theological conversations has been accepted by Lutherans. All major church bodies of both denominations in North America will be represented when the talks are initiated early next year.

Plans for the informal discussions were announced jointly by Dr. James I. McCord, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, and Dr. Paul C. Empie, executive director of the National Lutheran Council. As spokesmen for the two groups, they emphasized that "merger is not being discussed," that "these conversations are to be

purely theological." Their announcement said the talks have been arranged to explore the theological relationship between the Lutheran and Reformed churches "to discover to what extent differences which have divided these communions in the past still constitute obstacles to mutual understanding."

Among questions at issue in the past, the most controversial, it was pointed out, centered on the Lord's Supper and Christology, election and predestination, and polity and discipline. "Our discussions have no immediate purpose in view other than an examination of the subjects chosen," the churchmen said. "There is no proposal that these conversations are to be directed toward a goal of pulpit and altar fellowship or union or similar objectives."

The first meeting of Lutheran and Reformed theologians is tentatively scheduled in January of 1962, another in the spring of 1963 and a third in the spring of 1964. The exact time and place of the initial session are still to be determined.

The invitation to enter into theological conversations was extended by Dr. McCord as secretary of the North American Area of The Alliance of the Reformed Churches Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian Order. Shorter forms of the official name are The World Presbyterian Alliance and The World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

"My colleagues and I have been following with great interest the Lutheran-Reformed theological conversations in Germany and France," Dr. McCord said in a letter to Dr. Empie last February, "and we feel that the time has come for us to begin them here in the United States." The proposal was addressed to the NLC's

Executive Committee, in its capacity as the U. S. A. Committee for the Lutheran World Federation, of which Dr. Empie is also the executive officer, and was tentatively accepted last March. Concurrence in the preliminary plans for the discussions was then obtained from the executive committees of the parent international organizations during their respective meetings last August, the World Alliance in Oegstgeest, the Netherlands, and the LWF in Warsaw, Poland.

Involved in the talks, in addition to the American members of the Alliance and the Federation, will be The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, which is not affiliated with the NLC or the LWF, and several Reformed and Presbyterian bodies that are not members of the Alliance. The NLC invited the Missouri Synod to participate in the free conference. In replying favorably, the committee said that "we are sincerely and wholeheartedly ready to participate in these conversations."

Arrangements for the meetings are being made by a planning committee consisting of Dr. McCord, Dr. George S. Hendry of Princeton Seminary, Dr. Warren Quanbeck of Luther Seminary at St. Paul, Minn., Dr. Theodore Tappert of Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia, Pa., and Dr. David Granskou, secretary of the NLC's Department of Theological Cooperation.

It is expected that the discussions will be conducted by sixteen theologians, whose names will be announced by the two groups in the near future. They will include six representatives of the American members of the World Alliance, six from the American members of the LWF, two from the Missouri Synod, and two from any Reformed or Presbyterian bodies that choose

to participate but are not members of the Alliance.

According to the planning committee's proposed agenda, the first session will be devoted to the following topics:

"An historical review of relations between Lutheran and Reformed churches in the past with special reference to the controversial issues which have divided them" and "A theological evaluation of these issues in the light of contemporary thinking in both churches."

To this report may be added that the date for the first meeting has been set definitely for Feb. 16 and 17. Professors Herbert J. A. Bouman and Martin H. Franzmann of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, have been asked by the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of the Missouri Synod to participate.

III

The India Evangelical Lutheran Church, at its third biennial convention in Ambur on Jan. 11 and 12, will be confronted with a decision on membership in the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. The latter body has been in existence since 1951. Both in the I. E. L. C. and in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, its parent body, the question of the former's affiliation with the F. E. L. C. has been under study. The Committee on Doctrinal Unity of the Missouri Synod recently dispatched the following Message to the Convention of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church:

Our committee sends sincere greetings to our brethren of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, assembled in convention at Ambur on January 11 and 12, 1962, and prays the Lord of the church to bestow His gracious benedictions on your deliberations and labors.

For some years our committee has been privileged to engage in fraternal discussions with the Interchurch Relations Committee of your church by correspondence and to have personal contacts with the Rev. B. H. Jackayya and a number of missionaries on furlough in the United States.

Our conversations dealt principally with your plans and activities regarding relations with other Lutheran groups in India, including possible membership in the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. We deeply appreciate the opportunity for frank and fraternal exchange of ideas with representatives of your church concerning the constitution of the Federation. We have given much prayerful thought to the implications of your possible membership in the Federation. We have endeavored to evaluate the constitution of the Federation and were highly gratified by its many excellent features, particularly by its frank acknowledgment of the need for a continuous theological dialog in the interests of promoting an ever fuller understanding of, and adherence to, Biblical doctrine and of growth in Lutheran confessional loyalty. We also called attention to possible inadequacies and expressed the hope that some items still resting solely on oral agreement might also be made explicit in writing as a safe and objective guide for the actions of all participants.

We desire to say to you, our brethren in India, that since you now constitute a self-governing church you will quite naturally wish to arrive at the final decision yourselves, being in a better position than we are to assess the opportunities and problems involved. We believe that a decision reached after mature deliberation and with due regard for all points of view,

freely and fully expressed, will best meet the requirements of your situation.

For every opportunity granted by God to His church, also in your midst, for a clear witness to the truth and power of the holy Gospel we rejoice and give thanks to God, and we are confident in Him that you, our brethren, will continue to be conscious of your responsibility under the Word of God and in loyalty to the scriptural witness of the Lutheran Symbols. We are equally confident that in all your undertakings you will continue to manifest a tender concern for the conscientious convictions of that family of Lutheran churches to whom historically you have been most intimately related, and will in the future maintain as free and fraternal an interchange with us as you have in the past.

For the preservation and growing strength of our cherished mutual ties and for the abundant success of your labors and your fellowship in the Gospel we implore the blessings of Almighty God for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our purpose to include this communication in our report to the next convention of our Synod.

With fraternal greetings,

The Committee on Doctrinal Unity

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Herbert J. A. Bouman, Secretary

November 6, 1961

IV

A report emanating from Kobe last October described a recent development in Japan:

Representatives of eleven missionary societies from four countries formally adopted here "a declaration of intent" to organize a united Lutheran church in Japan.

In a unanimous vote, 50 delegates at a two-day meeting approved plans to hold a constituting convention on Reformation Day of 1962—October 31—that will bring into being a new Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (Nikon Fukian Ruteru Kyokai).

According to the merger timetable, the unified church will begin to function by January of 1963, the year marking the tenth anniversary of the union negotiations and the 70th anniversary of the beginning of Lutheran mission work in Japan.

The new church, expected to consolidate five missions from the United States, three from Norway, two from Denmark, and one from Finland, will consist of some 10,000 members in 200 congregations and preaching places served by 100 Japanese pastors and 100 missionaries.

Although The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has not taken part in the merger talks, it was represented at the meeting, Oct. 22—23, by the Synod's Japan Mission. The observer was the Rev. Kosaku Nao, pastor of the Tokyo Lutheran Center church, and a teacher at the Missouri Synod's theological seminary in the Center.

The declaration of intent opened with a quotation from Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

"In keeping with this faith," the statement continued, "we, the Lutheran churches of Japan, believe that it is the will of God that we share together in the Lutheran heritage; and that we labor together in the advancement of the Gospel.

"Accordingly, on the basis of this faith, we have conducted union negotiations since 1953; and, therein, have discovered the oneness of faith and a unity in organizational concern which exists among us.

"Therefore, we anticipate the formation of a united Evangelical Lutheran church in Japan, at a constituting convention to be held on Reformation Day, 1962.

"Further, we desire that other churches which hold this same faith and purpose will join with us in this church.

"Thus, remembering all that has gone before, and in thankfulness for the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit, we hereby declare our intention to form a united Evangelical Lutheran church in Japan."

Presiding at the session of pastors, laymen, and missionaries was Dr. Chitose Kishi, head of the present Japan Lutheran Church from which the new body will take its name, and also president of Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tokyo, which has an average yearly enrollment of 40 students and graduates 5 to 10 annually to serve as pastors. Dr. Kishi has spearheaded the merger negotiations and is chairman of the Constitution Committee.

The fifth and final draft of the constitution and bylaws for the united body was completed last April and is now being given final approval by the home boards and societies of the various missions.

Possibly the knottiest problem faced in preparation of the union documents was the question of national church authority versus district authority, and provisions were written into the constitution to provide a judicious balance of responsibility in these areas. In the words of one participant in the negotiations, the constitution "assures freedom of procedure and

practice by the individual districts, but clearly establishes the new body as an organically unified church, not a federation."

The church will be divided into eight districts, each consisting of at least ten local congregations in the area, to carry out evangelistic, educational, financial, social welfare, and other necessary activities under policies set by the national administration of the church.

American groups involved in the merger are the United Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, Augustana Lutheran Church, and the Suomi Synod. The Church of the Lutheran Brethren, the sixth mission here from the U. S., has not participated.

(By the time the union in Japan is consummated next fall, three of the American bodies will have taken similar steps. The ULCA, Augustana, and Suomi are scheduled to merge next June with the American Evangelical Lutheran Church into the Lutheran Church in America.)

Norway is represented by the Norwegian Missionary Society, Norwegian Lutheran Mission, and Lutheran Free Church of Norway; Denmark by the Christian Mission to Buddhists and the Danish Missionary Society; and Finland by the Finnish Lutheran Missionary Society.

Lutheran missions activity was pioneered in Japan in 1892 by the United Lutheran Synod of the South and later resulted in formation of the autonomous Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, an affiliated church of the ULCA. With some 9,000 members, it is the largest Lutheran group in the country.

In 1951 the various missions banded together to form an "All Lutheran Free Conference" in which The Lutheran Church

—Missouri Synod Mission continues to participate. In October 1953 a Lutheran Unity Committee was formed to pursue the idea of a united church.

After countless meetings, proposals, and drafts, the Unity Committee finished its work in March 1957, at which time a "doctrinal witness" was agreed upon, as well as a detailed statement of "organizational recommendations." A doctrinal statement, as such, was never felt necessary for union. Later, this largely missionary committee was succeeded by the Constitution Committee, which has had a large proportion of Japanese members and whose chairman, Dr. Kishi, is considered the likely choice as president of the new Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Dr. Kishi, 63, has been head of the present JELC since 1947, when it was reconstituted as a separate body. During World War II, under government pressure, the Lutherans had merged with members of other Protestant denominations in Japan in a united church, the Kyodan.

The Japanese churchman, who was imprisoned briefly during the war for "preaching for peace," has been a participant in World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation conferences and in 1957 delivered a major address at the LWF's Assembly in Minneapolis. He has studied at several American institutions and at the University of Leipzig in Germany and in 1953 received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Lenoir Rhyne College, an American Lutheran institution at Hickory, N. C.

This movement is of considerable importance to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Mission in Japan which is eager to keep its contacts with the other Lutherans in that country.

V

The continued existence of the Lutheran Synodical Conference has come into question very prominently in recent months. In August 1961, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod resolved to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod. In the same month the Evangelical Lutheran Synod took a step beyond its 1955 suspension of fellowship with Missouri and resolved to address a resolution to the convention of the Synodical Conference to be held late this year to the effect that the Synodical Conference should resolve to disband. In response to the action of the Wisconsin Synod, Missouri's Committee on Doctrinal Unity has asked Wisconsin's Theological Commission for a meeting in order to reopen the discussions ended last year and to endeavor to reach an understanding. The text follows. It gives expression to the sincere hope, cherished by the President of the Missouri Synod, its Committee on Doctrinal Unity, and many other of its members that the dissolution of the Synodical Conference may yet be avoided.

December 2, 1961

The Commission on Doctrinal Matters
Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod
c/o President Oscar J. Naumann
4933 N. 67th Street
Milwaukee 18, Wisconsin

Dear Brethren:

Thank you for the copy of the doctrinal resolutions adopted at your recent convention. Let me say that the resolutions which suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod continue to sad-

den us. The meeting of the officials of the Synodical Conference with the presidents of the constituent synods, where we carefully studied the suspension resolutions, did not diminish our sadness. We find it extremely difficult to believe that church bodies so closely united in Scriptural doctrine and in the Lutheran Confessions should discontinue fellowship.

In your resolutions, however, we are happy to note also a ray of hope for future contacts. I call attention to your expressed willingness to resume doctrinal discussion under certain circumstances.

In consultation with, and with the support of, the Praesidium of our Synod and the Committee on Doctrinal Unity I, therefore, herewith cordially invite you to meet with us on some date in January 1962, on which we can mutually agree. We invite you to meet with us in St. Louis, if that is possible.

Kindly inform us when such a meeting can be held.

Cordial Greetings!
Yours in Christ,



CC:

The Rev. John Daniel
The Rev. Paul Rafaj, D. D.
The Rev. Milton Tweit
Prof. H. J. A. Bouman, D. D.

In a future issue we hope to be able to report on several other items involving interchurch relationships which will confront our church at its Cleveland convention. ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER