

# FOREWORD

by Joel Lehenbauer

**J**UST OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, in June 2010, a group of twenty-five leaders representing a dozen Lutheran churches from around the globe met on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., for what was described as a “Confessional Leadership Conference,” sponsored by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the LCMS. The genesis of this conference was a resolution (3-03) adopted by the 2007 convention of the Synod. This resolution

- rejoiced that “the LCMS has been richly blessed with theological resources including two outstanding seminaries and a rich heritage and history of being confessionally strong,” and that “the LCMS is blessed to work with other confessional Lutheran churches around the world;”
- urged “the CTCR, in consultation with the Office of the President and our seminaries, [to] coordinate fundamentally constructive and intentionally supportive efforts such as theological symposia [and] conferences ... to uphold and nurture confessional Lutheranism;” and
- asked that “members of partner churches, members of the ILC, as well as other church bodies and individuals be invited to participate” in these events for the purpose of “furthering and nurturing confessional Lutheran theology at home and abroad.”

One month later, at its convention in July 2010, the Synod commended the CTCR for its efforts in organizing this conference and essentially said (in Res. 3-02A): “Do it again! Do it even bigger and better!: This led to the September 2012 International Conference on Confessional Leadership held near Atlanta, Ga., which brought together some 120 Lutheran (and also non-Lutheran) leaders from around the world for the purpose of mutual edification and encouragement and for the promotion of the Gospel-centered teachings that stand at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century.

A year later, at its 2013 convention, the Synod said: “Praise God for these efforts! With 2017 approaching, we dare not stop now.” “World Lutheranism,” observed the Synod in Res. 4-04, “is in the process of a seismic realignment, which creates tremendous opportunities and challenges.” “The memory and theology of the Reformation ... is in serious danger of extinction,” even among churches and organizations around the world that bear the name “Lutheran” but have forsaken critical aspects of historic Lutheran theology. “We urge the CTCR and the President’s Office to continue their plans” for another international conference in the year 2015, “to discuss possibilities for collaborative efforts among confessional Lutherans around the world toward the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017” (Res. 4-04).

That led to the May 2015 International Conference on Confessional Leadership held in Wittenberg, Germany, in conjunction with the May 3 dedication of the International Luther Center at the Old Latin School (<http://thewittenbergproject.org/>). Some 125 Lutheran leaders from 41 countries representing 23 Lutherans worldwide gathered together in Wittenberg, the cradle of the Reformation, to reflect on the theme “Celebrating the Reformation Rightly: Remembrance, Repentance, Rejoicing.” This issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* contains presentations and sermons delivered at this historic around that theme. We hope you find them instructive, encouraging and challenging.

As you read and reflect on these essays and sermons, please know and be assured, as conference participants were informed and assured: ***“That we, as a Synod, give thanks for the encouragement of the bold witness and dedication to the Word of God of confessional Lutheran church bodies around the world and urge the members of the Synod to pray for these church bodies ... that God may continue to bless us and them”*** (2013 Res. 4-04).

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