

GREETINGS

TO THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL SEMINARIES CONFERENCE

AUG. 8–11, 2013, PALANGA, LITHUANIA

by Hans-Jörg Voigt

MY DEAR BROTHERS IN CHRIST, it is a special honor for me to greet you, the leaders of the Confessional Lutheran Seminaries Conference, on behalf of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the ILC Executive Committee. I greet you with Is. 26:1–2: “In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.’”

Last Sunday’s readings remind us of Jerusalem and the people of God. Persecution and suffering are part of the life of God’s people, and the Old Testament perspective teaches that very clearly. Therefore, God’s people are seeking a strong city fortified with walls and bulwarks. There is safety only in the city of God.

Jesus teaches us: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). In the Gothic Cathedral of Naumburg, a small city south of Leipzig, there is a marvelous choir

screen. It separates the nave from the choir. In the middle of the choir screen, there is a small gate that is formed by a sculptured crucifixion of Christ. As you enter the choir toward the altar chancel, you must pass under the outstretched arms of Christ the crucified.

That is, of course, the message of the Gospel: We are saved from slavery to the world by the outstretched arms of Christ Jesus, entering into the celestial Jerusalem by Baptism. Thus, all our persecutions and sufferings are merely preliminary; we’ve passed through!

I am personally interested in the subject and theme of your conference. Growing up in East Germany under the Communist regime, I can well understand the situation that prevailed in the Baltic states, in Russia and Belorussia.

May God richly bless this Fifth International Lutheran Council Seminaries Conference in the presence of Him who said, “I am the gate,” and who has protected us by His outstretched arms. Thank you.

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The Rev. Hans-Jörg Voigt is bishop of Germany’s Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) and the chairman of the International Lutheran Council.