

Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations

Subject: WELS/ELS/LCMS informal discussions

Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) Memorial 2023-03 speaks to the issue of the informal meetings that have occurred between leaders of WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 2012; and

WHEREAS 2) “after almost 30 years of doctrinal disagreement,” the synod in convention “suspended fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod” in 1961; and

WHEREAS 3) this memorial requests that “the informal meetings with the LCMS be replaced with the method that is currently being used in our dealings with the CLC (Church of the Lutheran Confession),” which are formal doctrinal discussions, a term that our Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) notes in their report that we use when “there may be reason to believe there may be doctrinal agreement”; and

WHEREAS 4) we respect the sensitivity with which these informal meetings—and the publicity about them—must be handled, so that we do not cause confusion among our brothers and sisters in WELS, especially for those “current members, pastors, and congregations of WELS who left the LCMS for the sake of the gospel and their own conscience,” since in 1961 our synod in convention “suspended fellowship with the LCMS”; and

WHEREAS 5) in 1961 the synod in convention also resolved that “under conditions which do not imply a denial of our previous testimony we stand ready to resume discussions with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with the aim of reestablishing unity of doctrine and practice and of restoring fellowship relations, these discussions to be conducted outside the framework of fellowship” (1961 *Proceedings*, pp. 198,199); and

WHEREAS 6) in 2012 the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) determined that circumstances were appropriate to resume discussions outside the framework of fellowship; and

WHEREAS 7) the synod in convention in 2013 resolved “that we encourage our leadership in conjunction with the Commission on Inter-Church Relations to continue discussions with the LCMS to strive for true unity based on full agreement in doctrine and practice” (2013 *Proceedings*, p. 32); and

WHEREAS 8) over the past 11 years the synod president has kept the members of the synod informed on the details of these informal discussions through avenues such as *Forward in Christ*, the *Together* e-newsletter, the WELS website, and answers to questions posted on the WELS website—and the CICR has done the same through its regular

reports to the synod in *Report to the Twelve Districts and Book of Reports and Memorials*; and

WHEREAS 9) these various publicity pieces have spoken candidly about the benefits of these discussions, as well as the realization that “none of the participants at these informal meetings anticipate a restoration of church fellowship between ELS/WELS and the LCMS in the near future” (WELS website post, Oct. 10, 2018); and

WHEREAS 10) in its report in the 2023 *Book of Reports and Memorials* the CICR “strongly endorses the continuation of informal talks with the Missouri Synod and has full confidence in those who represent the commission in them,” believing that these continued informal talks with the LCMS “are beneficial for both synods, as well as for our sister synod, the ELS, which is a full partner in the talks”; and

WHEREAS 11) the CICR does not believe we are in a position to initiate “formal doctrinal discussions,” which would mean “there is reason to believe there may be doctrinal agreement”; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that the synod in convention continue to support the ongoing informal conversations between WELS, the ELS, and the LCMS; and be it further

Resolved, b) that the Conference of Presidents and the CICR continue to update the members of the synod as to developments in these conversations; and be it finally

Resolved, c) that we continue to ask the Lord of the Church in his mercy to grant that these informal conversations someday lead to formal discussions and then to the day when it can be said that doctrinal unity truly exists between these three synods on the basis of Holy Scripture, so that fellowship could be declared.

Pastor David P. Kolander, chairman
Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

ADOPTED