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Lutheran
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“For the Sake of the Gospel”

Chile – Parochial Education Curriculum Project

Interview with The CLEF President, Rev. John Fehrman

By Erika Gehrke

Tell me about the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Chile (IELCHI)?

The IELCHI is a mission outreach of the Lutheran Church in Argentina, an older and larger church body. Pastors from Argentina came to Chile to assist because of the common language – Spanish. Currently, there are five Lutheran pastors in Chile. All but one of the pastors originally comes from Argentina. There are two large Lutheran schools in Chile, one in Valparaiso and one in Viña del Mar, with about 1200 students in grades Kindergarten through 12th.

The tuition charged for each student supports both the congregation and school. The Chilean government also subsidizes tuition costs because it recognizes the benefit of a good education. Since the government requires the school to assist the poor, about one-third of the students do not pay tuition. The government also has periodic testing to evaluate each grade and each school. The Lutheran schools always score highly so parents send their children there.

Pastors teach from the catechism in religion class requiring the students to learn Lutheran doctrine. If the student does not want to be there, that is fine. There is a big waiting list. The parents of students are also required to go through an adult Confirmation class. Last time I visited, 35 new families joined because of the adult Confirmation class. The IELCHI grows by providing adult education.

How does the religious nature of Chile influence the Lutheran church and schools there?

Chile is a predominantly Catholic country, and most of the students are Catholic. The issues in Chile are different from in a non-Christian country. The pastors are not beaten, churches are not burned, there is not the persecution like in Sri Lanka, or other non-Christian countries. Most folk recognize the Triune God; in fact, even believe in the Trinity. However, Mariolatry is very pronounced. Lutherans contend against Mary, and that does not go over well. However, when the Gospel is presented, the Spirit pulls them away from idol worship and the church grows.

What project is The CLEF doing for the IELCHI?

The CLEF is supporting IELCHI by giving support to the schools, translating and publishing books and materials, and translating their hymnal as part of the International Lutheran Hymnal Project.

Specifically, The CLEF is funding the writing, translating, and publication of a religious curriculum for grades 1–12. The IELCHI has written a religion curriculum in Spanish. The CLEF is helping to revise it, assist in the publication expense, so that it can be provided to the students at reduced cost for the books.

Why is this necessary?

A Lutheran school needs a confessional Lutheran curriculum. The IELCHI is a small, poor church body, especially compared to Lutheran church bodies in the U.S. Those who support The CLEF are the difference in the lives of Chilean students by providing them with confessional Lutheran education materials. The Spanish religious education curriculums in Chile are either Catholic or Baptist. Lutheran schools have nothing to use. Recently, they have been printing their own books. The CLEF will help in revising and adding additional resources to the books, and raising the quality of the publication. Because of this, the students will receive a better Lutheran education, which will in turn benefit the church in many ways.

How will this help the church body?

The curriculum will have better material. Better material used by good teachers in a Lutheran school will have a tremendous benefit to the students, and therefore the church. With better, more thorough materials, the students will receive a superior catechetical education that will benefit their families and the church.

The CLEF is making the curriculum better in both appearance and quality. Concordia Catechetical Academy gave The CLEF the right to translate portions of their material into Spanish, which will be included in the curriculum. The curriculum will now provide references to the Lutheran Confessions and direct catechetical references. The CLEF cannot improve doctrine, but we can include additional information and have more concise explanations for the students to increase their learning and understanding.

How can congregations support this project?

Congregations and individuals wishing to support this project can send a check to:

Confessional Lutheran Education Foundation
PO Box 43844
Minneapolis, MN 55443-0844

Please designate the gift to the Chile Parochial Education Curriculum.

When you give a gift to The CLEF, designated to Chile Parochial Education Curriculum project, or other projects around the globe, your gift will go to that project.

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