



confessional Lutheran *education foundation*

“For the sake of the Gospel”

International Lutheran Hymnal Project

Interview with Rev. John Fehrmann, The CLEF President

By Erica Gehrke – CLEF reporter

What is the International Lutheran Hymnal project?

The International Lutheran Hymnal Project is a project funded by The CLEF to produce, translate, and publish and introduce Lutheran Hymnals for Lutheran Church bodies in countries with several languages and no common Lutheran hymnal. The CLEF is now working with Lutheran Church bodies in 9 countries with 13 different languages to publish common hymnals for church bodies striving for unity in doctrine, liturgy, hymnody and practice in their church.

What is the purpose of the hymnal project?

One of the most important tools a church body uses is a hymnbook. Luther called it “the Bible of the laity.” Historically, most church bodies have been derelict in producing lasting quality hymnals. The International Lutheran Hymnal Project will assist in providing church bodies and their membership with common liturgies and hymns. Most of the church bodies with whom The CLEF is working have never had a common hymnal. Mostly they have had to use old used American hymnals.

What is the background for the International Lutheran Hymnal Project?

The CLEF translates, publishes, and introduces into various countries in the world confessional Lutheran books. Recently, The CLEF received specific requests for “worship” materials from three continents. For this project, four church bodies approached The CLEF within a few weeks of each other and asked if we would consider redoing their hymnbooks. The CLEF board of directors agreed and pledged to do whatever possible to raise the necessary funds. It soon turned into a very large undertaking after more countries heard of the project.

How will the hymnals be produced?

A committee of trained pastors for each language in each country will put the hymnals together. Their task will be to choose the liturgies and hymns for the hymnal, from a list The CLEF has comprised of eight liturgies dating back to the Reformation and over 600, 100% doctrinally sound hymns for this project. The committees will choose from this selection approximately 300 hymns to include in each of their languages for each different language hymnal. Many of the hymns are original to the project and not so culturally dependent, meaning each country can use their own tunes and harmonies for the hymns. The committees will then chose 100-150 hymns unique to their country or language. Each language will have common liturgies for their church body. The hymnal/s will also include the catechism, preface to Augsburg confession, prayers, pericopes, and collects – all of which will be a great benefit to the congregations, putting more confessional Lutheran materials in their hands. Once the committees have chosen the liturgies and hymns, mother tongue translators will translate the hymnals into the languages of the church body. From there, the hymnals will be printed and put into the hands of the people. With guidance from The CLEF’s experience, church bodies will produce a confessional, uniform hymnal.

How long will the project take?

Honestly, I do not see it ending. The need will increase as more Lutheran Church bodies become aware of this project / opportunity. The first hymnal likely to be completed will be an English hymnbook for countries that speak English as one of the “official” languages (i.e. Ghana) By the end of this year of 2009, Ghana, Philippines, and South America (Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia) will have working committees.

What benefit will the hymnal have?

As Luther said, “the hymnal is the Bible of the laity.” A hymnal puts sound doctrine into words and easily remembered music. The hymnal will bring together Lutherans worldwide in the Divine Service, where God forgives our sins through the Gospel and the Sacraments.

In countries where there is more than one language, a hymnal is very special. Those without common hymnbooks know what is missing: unity in doctrine and practice. They lack confessional liturgy in print. They do not want diversity. A common hymnbook creates unity rather than confusion. What we are so often wanting and willing to throw away in the United States, others are begging and praying to God that He will provide such for them.

How do you see it making a difference for Lutheranism worldwide?

Anytime a part of the worldwide Lutheran body is strengthened it benefits the whole. The hymnbook itself is a very effective tool in the worship life of the church. As “the Bible of the laity,” a hymnbook, through the Divine Service, teaches the congregation right doctrine and practice. Translating and producing a common hymnal is as critical as translating the Bible or the Lutheran Confessions or even dozens of catechisms..

I expect this project to be a model others will want to use in the future. We expect to be inundated with requests as more church bodies hear of the project.

How is The CLEF well suited for this project?

The CLEF is a confessional Lutheran para-church organization working at the request of Lutheran church bodies. The CLEF is honored that many Lutheran church bodies have asked us to assist in producing their hymnals. The CLEF has great confidence in the overseas committees, translators, editors and reviewers and those here in the US supporting this effort. Together with your support, The CLEF hopes to produce at least one hymnal for every family or person who attends our Confessional Lutheran sister churches in these countries. Many of the church bodies The CLEF works with are very small and others are comparatively large. Our resources can go far to bring Confessional Lutheran resources to our Confessional Lutheran brothers and sisters. It is all “*for the sake of the Gospel*”.

How can you, others and congregations support this project?

If you have a love for Confessional Lutheran hymns, liturgies and worship order / practice, you will be hard pressed not to support this project. For Confessional Lutherans, supporting this project for the sake of the Gospel is a “no brainer” – it is a project that must be supported.

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

Confessional Lutheran Education Foundation
PO Box 43844
Minneapolis, MN 55443

Please designate the gift to the International Lutheran Hymnal Project (ILHP)

When you give a gift to CLEF, designated to International Lutheran hymnal project, or other projects around the globe, your gift will go to that project.

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