

Best Reformation Ever

The Lutheran Reformation continues to bear fruit all over the world and especially in Gambella, Ethiopia today. Gambella Evangelical Lutheran Church (GELC) started in 2018 with a few men who had become frustrated with the false teaching of their other denominations. In 2021, the One Africa Team of the Wisconsin Synod directed their leader, Opiew Okugn to investigate the TELL Bible Study program from WELS' Multi-Language Productions.

Learning About Baptism

One Africa Team member first met the church leaders face-to-face in March of 2023. The congregation had the common misunderstanding: "Since we don't have an ordained pastor, we cannot make use of the sacraments."

OAT representatives Joel Hoff and Dan Kroll taught about the sacraments in 2024. Any Christian who has a true understanding of the three persons of the Trinity can and should baptize. GELC leaders requested a baptismal liturgy from OAT. They even organized baptismal certificates for the fifty-seven who were baptized on that weekend.



More than a year later, the members of GELC are still baptizing. Four infants were brought into God's kingdom through baptism just the week before Missionary Kroll arrived in mid-October. We praise the Lord for growth in this understanding. We also thank God for the growth of his kingdom amongst the Anuak Tribe living in Gambella!

Teaching the Lutheran Confessions

In some inhospitable weather (i.e., hot and humid), Missionary Kroll studied the Lutheran Confessions with GELC members. Everyone took notes on the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Reformation contained in the Book of Concord. These are the Augsburg Confession, the Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles, The Power and Primacy of the Pope, and The Formula of Concord.

Missionary Kroll used this opportunity to review the foundational teaching of Scripture - salvation by grace alone - with GELC members. He explained the

concept of the *opinio legis*. This is a false idea that we can gain God's favor by obeying his law. Missionary Kroll also warned GELC member about the Roman Catholic false teaching on the Sacraments. Namely, it is impossible to merit God's favor by virtue what the priest is doing *ex opere operato* (from the work done), without regard to the faith of the person receiving the sacrament. The Bible urges us to receive God's blessings with faith in Jesus' salvation, as promised and delivered by the Sacraments.

The theological terms themselves are not important. We do however encounter the concepts they express often. We find them in the Lutheran Confessions, in our own communities, and even in our own hearts. With trust in God's Word we look forward the battle against false teachings, wherever they may be found.

Discussing Church Practice

GELC members and Missionary Kroll discussed how traditions can interfere with worship when people focus on what they like. Our Anuak brothers recognized that they could be flexible about the number of hymns in a worship service. They acknowledged that desire for authority and honor can lead to conflict in the church. GELC currently utilizes only those offices of ministry that are necessary for good order.



Missionary Kroll and GELC members tackled these subjects with a lot of interactive homework and discussions. There was much laughter, a little spirited debate, and much time spent enjoying good meals together. It was a week of building relationship based on the true Word of God.

The week's meetings ended with a Reformation Festival on Sunday. Worshippers enjoyed plenty of singing and a strong message about freedom. They listened to readings from Jeremiah 31, Galatians 5 and heard a great gospel sermon on John 8:31-36. David was the "moderator." Mataya played the keyboard. Okwori delivered the sermon. Omod Ochalla, Opiew Okugn and Omod Otong read the Scripture lessons. In other words, every GELC leader had a role to play. A key theme of the Lutheran Reformation is that in the Church, everybody has a job to do.



Please offer a prayer for this congregation to hold firmly to the gospel they have learned. "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end." (Hebrews 3:13).

Missionary Dan Kroll lives in Malawi.

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news, and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>