

Enter Stage Right

A corporate merger is a process that happens one stage at a time. It unites two or more business organizations with overlapping interests. The decision may be made mutually by all parties. The goal is to increase the efficiency and reach of the new entity's brand. The decision to merge may be the unintended consequence of financial difficulties that one of the partners is experiencing. A hostile takeover often leads to the dissolution of the weaker partner's identity and assets.

Mergers between church bodies occur frequently for similar reasons, and with similar results. Instead of struggling to maintain separate worker training systems, church bodies can send their future called workers to the same schools. Church bodies can combine their resources to more effectively deliver humanitarian aid to the people in their communities. But the administrative advantages that are gained come with a cost. Church mergers often come at the expense of doctrinal integrity. Church bodies "agree to disagree" in the name of compromise.

The CICR

The Wisconsin Synod stands firm in its commitment to advancing God's Kingdom. WELS works with like-minded partners without compromising pure teaching or evangelical practice. The WELS Commission on Inter-church Relations (CICR) is an agency for preserving and strengthening relationships with other church bodies. These relationships are built on the foundation of complete unity of doctrine and practice. You can read a summary of the CICR's work and mission at <https://wels.net/commission-inter-church-relations-holds-fall-meeting/>



The choir of the AMEC congregation in the village of Akeri

WELS has an increasing number of mission opportunities in Africa. The CICR and OAT have developed a Four-Stage process to guide discussions with potential ministry partners. The process outlines benchmarks that must be met to continue the dialogue. The end result is a formal declaration of fellowship. We and our potential partners discuss our understanding of Lutheran teachings. We explore evangelical ministry practices. We also outline our expectations of what this partnership may entail. The process continues on the condition that both parties agree.

AMEC

The Lutheran Church has deep historic roots in the East Africa country of Tanzania. German missionaries were active in the region during the last two decades of the 19th century. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) numbers almost 8 million members. There are also smaller Tanzanian Lutheran church bodies.

KARL EWARD
SEGEBROCK OVIR

EV. LUTH. MISSIONARE
† 20. OKT. 1896

SIEHE, WIR PREISEN SELIG,
DIE ERDULDET HABEN
IAC 5. 11.

The graves of martyred German Lutheran missionaries to Tanzania

The African Mission Evangelical Church (AMEC) is a Lutheran Church body in Tanzania. It was formed in 1993 as the result of a split within the ELCT over doctrine and practice. In 2019 WELS received an inquiry from Pastor Davis Makundi of the AMEC. One Africa Team Missionary John Hartmann has been corresponding with Rev. Makundi.

AMEC's future is in danger both doctrinally and organizationally. After the split with the ELCT, AMEC has struggled to maintain a corps of confessionally Lutheran pastors. AMEC never set up its own worker training system. Many congregations are served by pastors who were trained in non-Lutheran seminaries. This has led to a weakening of doctrinal unity in the church body.

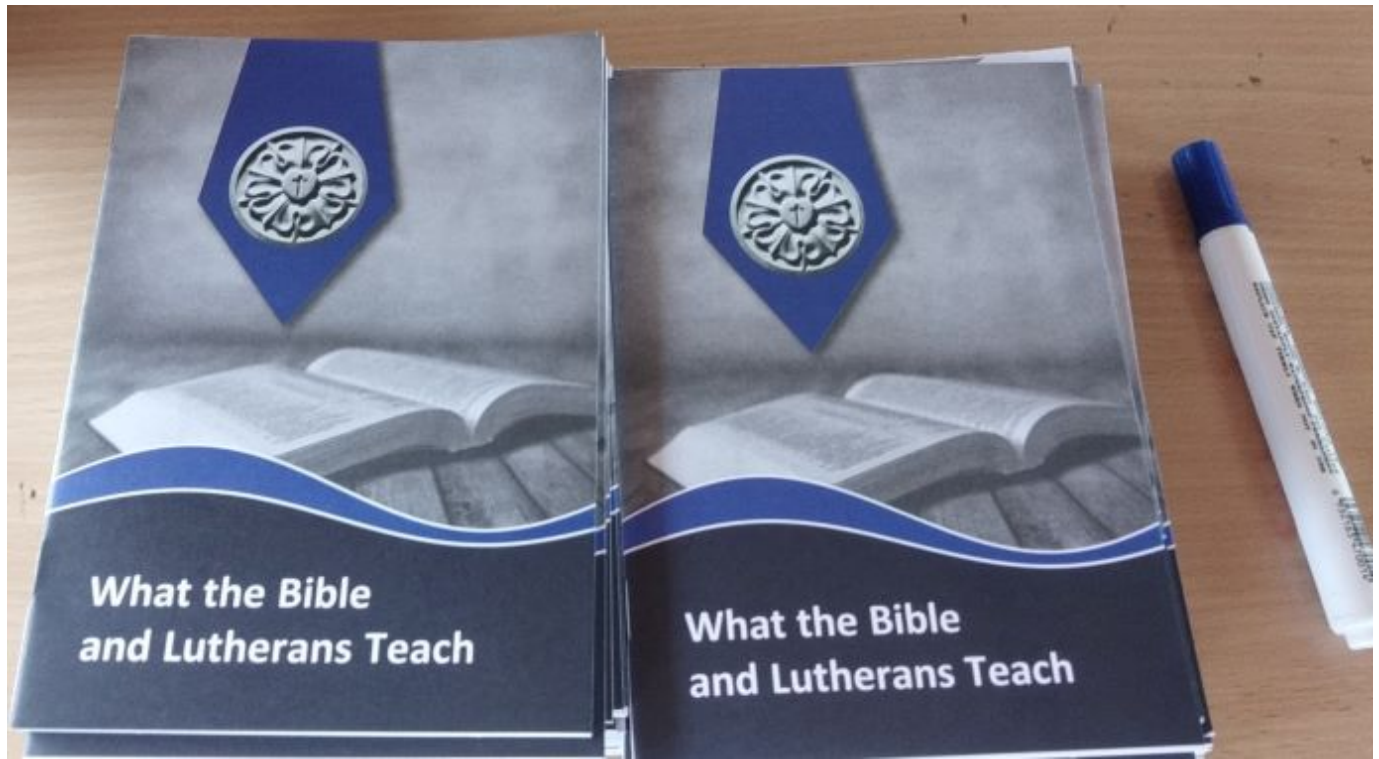


Bishop Baltazari Kaaya is AMEC's leader

AMEC's leader, Bishop Baltazari Kaaya, was trained in the ELCT Seminary many decades ago. He is committed to the teachings of the Confessional Lutheran Church. He recognizes his church body's need for new pastors who are committed to Lutheran teaching and practice.

Stage One

One Africa Team is using the Four-Stage Process with AMEC. In April 2021 Missionary Hartmann made a preliminary visit to meet with about a dozen AMEC pastors. This was an opportunity to learn more about their history and to introduce them to the WELS. In November 20201 Missionary Hartmann and Missionary John Roebke made a follow-up visit to begin Stage One of the process.



What the Bible and Lutherans Teach has been published in 26 languages

The purpose of Stage One is to determine if we have the same understanding of Lutheran doctrine. Hartmann and Roebke met with a dozen AMEC church workers for one week. They read and discussed the pamphlet *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*

Pastor Mark Anariko Onunda of the LCMC-Kenya accompanied the two Missionaries. He served as both a linguistic and a cultural translator. Rev. Onunda is the leader of the LCMC-Kenya, one of WELS's mission partners in Africa. Some of the topics that were discussed included the Triune God, Man and Woman, Justification, Conversion, and Baptism. It took about 1-2 hours to discuss each teaching and related questions. The mission team intends to return to Tanzania in 2022. They will discuss other key

teachings such as the Lord's Supper, Fellowship, Marriage and Divorce, and the Government.



Rev. Mark Onunda is the leader of the LCMC-Kenya

The Next Stages

God-willing, the WELS and AMEC will continue to make process in their discussions. Stage Two provides an opportunity to compare our understanding of church practices. We take a look at Worship, Bible Study, Stewardship, and Ministry training. In Stage Three, we review the church body's existing church structure and constitution. We ask for clarifications or make suggestions for improvement.

The Fourth Stage is working with the partner to prepare a formal request for fellowship to the CICR. We help organize face-to-face talks with representatives from WELS. WELS then recommends the church body to its partners in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).



OAT Missionaries and church leaders of AMEC met in Arusha, Tanzania in November 2021

The WELS does not merge with its sister churches around the world. Rather, the WELS recognizes each of them as an independent church body. This is in everyone's best interests. An autonomous church body is much stronger and healthier than one which is dependent on another church body for support. The WELS wishes to use its God-given resources to help sister church bodies around the world. WELS helps them develop and grow in ways that are appropriate for each partner. May God bless our efforts with AMEC in Tanzania and elsewhere around the globe.

Missionary John Roebke 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>