

The Elephant in the Room



One does not stop the advance of an elephant – nor can a pastor stop advancing his own ability to handle the Scriptures

There was an elephant in the room.

Everyone knew it. But as is so often the case, no one said anything.

The group of LCCA-Malawi Synod pastors and I were together having a 2-day Professional Development course. Topic: Sanctification. Our discussions revolved around the 12 disciples and their relationship with Jesus. We learned a lot about the disciples, but perhaps we learned more about our Lord...and ourselves.

Like Judas, we have betrayed others. Like Thomas, we at times have doubted God and His word. Like Peter, speaking rashly before thinking wisely, we have put our “foot in our mouths.” Each disciple a sinner – yet each one was loved dearly by Jesus. In fact, He loved them to death.

That is really what the Professional Development program of the Confessional Lutheran Institute (CLI) is all about: learning more about Jesus and his dying – and undying – love for us. Every course has been comforting and convicting. Comforting because of Jesus’ grace and forgiveness. Convicting because of the law. Like a mirror, it has shown us our sin. Sometimes we just do not want to say anything – even when the elephant is right there in the room with us.

The elephant was in the room and everyone knew it. It was big. But not one of us said anything. We were holding our Professional Development course in a national park, a place with freely roaming wild animals like lions, cheetahs, buffalo, hyenas and, yes, elephants. Suddenly, a 6-ton pachyderm walked into the “room.” Don’t think walls and windows and doors. Think Africa. Open air. Bush camp. It really was not in our room; we were in his. This was his territory.

We put down our books and paused our discussions about Peter, James, and John. We hushed. We enjoyed the moment and one of God’s amazing creatures. We watched as the elephant stripped nearby trees and bushes and ate the branches and leaves. The big brute eventually meandered on and then we continued our dialogue on the twelve.

In Malawi, our Professional Development groups do not usually meet in a park but when we have done so it has been a blessing. We enjoyed the Bible based lessons in an open-air African bush environment. Fellowship around the word of God is a blessing no matter where we meet. Normally we gather at the local LCCA churches for these informal studies.

The program in Malawi follows a simple path: the pastors suggest a topic they wish to learn, the facilitator prepares it and takes it to each of the 5 pastor groups scattered around Malawi. Assignment presentations follow. In addition to Sanctification, we have covered topics such as marriage, Reformation, cultural Awareness, Power Point Bible Studies, and others. Like the elephant, now we are ready to move on.



The pastors of the Zomba-Phalombe district of Malawi

Moving on does not mean stopping the program in Malawi; it does mean taking it elsewhere: to our African Sister Synods. There are 7 synods in 6 countries: Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Combined there are over 100 Called Workers in these 7 synods. God willing, in the years ahead additional church bodies in additional countries will join our fellowship. These churches will have pastors who also want to continue to grow together with us.

Moving on also doesn't mean that we are providing professional development using the same method everywhere. Likewise, the teachers may be different depending on the situation. In some cases a local missionary; in others a visiting pastor from the United States; in other cases a team of national pastors or seminary instructors from a sister church; the possibilities are endless.



The logo of the Confessional Lutheran Institute was designed by Caitlin Voigt, the daughter of Zambia missionaries John & Sharon Hartmann

The newly formed Confessional Lutheran Institute (CLI) strives to “equip, enhance, and enable pastors throughout Africa.” Unlike the formal Continuing Education branch of CLI with its Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology programs, these informal, practical courses in the Professional Development branch of CLI are not for academic credit towards a diploma. This program - whether it is a 1-day class, a 2-day workshop, or a full week course - is there to help us “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18). Peter discovered, learned, and experienced incomparable peace in His Savior’s forgiveness. Professional

Development is an opportunity for us to do the same.

Even when there's an elephant in the room.

Missionary John Holtz lives in Malawi and directs the Professional Development branch of the Confessional Lutheran Institute. This is the second of a three-part series on the CLI.



Register now for the joint LWMS/WELS online missions convention at <https://welstasteandsee.com/> which begins on June 27th, 2020

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>