

In early October I am spending one week in Santiago, Chile, as a team member of the International Lutheran-Pentecostal dialogue. I started learning about Pentecostals in 2008 when I joined the staff of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. The Institute was founded in 1965 to help Lutheran churches around the world improve their relationships with other Christian churches.

When I began this work, dialogue between Lutherans and Pentecostals was very new and very rare. Lutherans had already been talking with Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Baptists for a long time, but few Lutherans even knew who Pentecostals were.

Here's a quick history lesson. Pentecostals started as a revival movement in Los Angeles (USA) in the early 1900s. It was made of Christians who felt that their faith and service were without power, dead and dry. They prayed for the renewing action of the Holy Spirit. As a result they experienced a profound sense of Christ's presence, healing of illnesses, speaking in tongues, and love across the dividing lines of nation, ethnicity, and race. Most other Christians were extremely suspicious of them, so in time they formed into new Pentecostal denominations. These have spread across the world, including to Japan, for example the 日本アッセンブリーズ・オブ・ゴッド教団. They are the fastest-growing Christian group in all of church history! Today there are more than 600 million Pentecostal Christians. In addition there are many charismatics within historic churches: Christians who have embraced speaking in tongues, healing, or ecstatic worship but have stayed within their traditional churches. In Africa, almost all the Lutherans are also charismatics.

It was very exciting for me to join a dialogue that was clearly necessary but so far mostly unexplored. I joined a discussion group sponsored by the Strasbourg Institute for Lutherans and Pentecostals. Here we had a chance to ask each other honest questions about each other's church. The result was that we came to respect each other and learned to appreciate the emphases of the other church.

There is now an official dialogue between Lutherans and Pentecostals sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation. It met for the first time in 2016 in Baguio, Philippines, at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary. Since this was a new group of people, we spent the week presenting the history, theology, and spirituality of our respective churches.

Since last year was 2017, it only made sense to have our second meeting in Wittenberg, Germany! Here we focused on how we proclaim the gospel through preaching, teaching, and acts of mercy.

At our 2018 meeting our topic is wealth, poverty, and the so-called "prosperity gospel." This last topic is important because many people simply equate it with Pentecostalism, but that is not accurate. "Prosperity gospel" is the idea that God rewards people who never doubt with huge wealth; the implication is that the rich are favored by God but the poor are poor because of their lack of faith. Clearly, this is the exact opposite of what the Old Testament prophets and Jesus taught, so naturally most Pentecostals reject it, too!

You might notice that we have met all over the world—first Asia, then Europe, and now in South America. This is a deliberate effort to reflect the global nature of Christianity, and to try to reach the local churches in each of those places. Next year we will meet in Africa. The final meeting of our five-year dialogue will take place in North America.

Please pray for me and for the success of ecumenical dialogue, so that, as Jesus said, "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).