

ABSTRACT (from The SELC District Website)

Who We Were:

The Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized in 1902 in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, with ten pastors and fifteen congregations. The first President was Rev. Daniel Laucek. The Slovak Synod was accepted into the Synodical Conference in 1908 under President Jan Pelikan. In 1959, due to the diminishing use of the Slovak language and identity, the Synod changed its name to the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. The Synod merged with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1971, becoming a non-geographical district, now known as the SELC District.

Who We Are:

Today the SELC spans the eastern half of the continent, with congregations in the United States and Canada. The SELC focuses on mission outreach here in the US and abroad. It has no full-time officers; all pastoral officers of the District remain in the parish, where they continue to serve the Lord as ministers of Word and Sacrament to His people.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE SELC DISTRICT

1) Slovaks come to America

- a) In the mid-to-late 1800s, waves of immigrants, including Slovaks, came to the USA.
- b) These Slovaks, being largely farmers, miners, and factory workers in their homeland, often settled
 - i) In rural areas like Streator, Illinois; Emporia, Virginia; and Slavia, Florida
 - ii) In coal-mining areas like southeastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania
 - iii) In steel towns like Pittsburgh and Bethlehem PA; Lorain, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana.
 - iv) In larger urban areas like Chicago, Cleveland, Minneapolis and Saint Louis
- c) Why these areas?
 - i) Economic opportunities
 - ii) Often responding to invitations from friends or relatives who had immigrated earlier.
 - iii) Sometimes responding to recruitment efforts by US companies like Union Carbide in Lakewood, Ohio

2) The SELC – names

- a) 1902-1913 - **Slovenská evanjelická celocirkev augsburgského vyznania v Spojených štátoch amerických** (which being interpreted is "*Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in the United States of America*")
 - i) Founded at St. Peter's Church in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, on September 2–4, 1902, with 15 congregations and 10 pastors.
 - ii) Note: Some Slovak Lutherans did not join this denomination, but founded the Slovak Zion Synod in 1919 (now a Synod in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
- b) 1913-1945 - **Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the United States of America** (aka "the Slovak Synod")
- c) 1945-1959 - **Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church**
- d) 1959-1971 - **Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches** (SELC as the acronym)
- e) 1971 – present – **The SELC District of The Lutheran-Church Missouri Synod**
 - i) In 1971 the SELC ceased to exist and operate *as an independent Synod* in the United States. An agreement was reached by the SELC and the LCMS that would

result in the SELC being “merged” into the LCMS as a non-geographic District, named “The SELC District.”

- ii) The “SELC” in the current name of the District is NOT an acronym, but rather the proper name of this District and in recognition of its heritage as a Synod. It is pronounced “ess – ee – ell – see” not “sellk”.
- iii) It is also incorrect to refer to the SELC as “the Slovak District” – there has never been a “Slovak District” as such in the LCMS.

3) The SELC and other Lutherans

- a) The Slovak Synod joined the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1910 and remained a member until the Synodical Conference dissolved in 1967.
 - i) This conference was composed of
 - (1) the Slovak Synod (later The Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches aka the SELC)
 - (2) the Missouri Synod (later The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod aka the LCMS)
 - (3) the Wisconsin Synod (later The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), and
 - (4) the Little Norwegian Synod (later The Evangelical Lutheran Synod)
 - ii) The intention of the Synodical Conference was to promote confessional and doctrinal unity with one another.
 - iii) Notably, the Synodical Conference undertook mission work among African-Americans and Native Americans, including the establishment of colleges in Greensboro, North Carolina and Selma, Alabama.
 - iv) The Synodical Conference also produced The Lutheran Hymnal in 1941.
- b) The SELC was a founding member (along with the LCMS, the American Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Church in America) of the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, which operated from 1967 to 1988.

4) The SELC and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

- a) Pastoral training
 - i) In the early decades, SELC congregations were formed by the various communities of lay people who sent letters to the Lutheran churches in Slovakia asking them to send pastors to the US.
 - (1) Upon arrival, some of these pastors would serve several congregations in different towns at once.
 - (2) Several of the pastors also traveled to other communities to help the Slovak Lutherans establish their own congregation and serve temporarily until they could get a pastor from Slovakia to serve them.
 - (3) Eventually, some of the sons of these pastors, and members of the congregations, would go to the seminary and become pastors themselves.
 - ii) When the Synodical Conference (3.a. above) dissolved over doctrinal differences between the members in 1967, the SELC retained close ties to the LCMS
 - (1) The SELC did not have a seminary of its own in the US; for some decades, SELC pastors were trained at the LCMS seminary in Springfield, Illinois. Thus, doctrinal agreement between the SELC and the LCMS was not an issue.
 - (2) On the faculty of the seminary during those times were Slovak pastors and professors, part of whose call to the seminary was to mentor the SELC pastors in

their preparation for ministry in the SELC (including tutoring in the Slovak language). Notable among these were

(a) Dr. George Dolak, who also wrote *A History of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, 1902-1927*, and

(b) Rev. Kenneth Ballas, who also served as a parish pastor in Montreal Canada and Greenwich, Connecticut.

b) Members of the SELC District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have also made significant contributions to various LCMS ministries over the years, including but not limited to

i) The SELC District Presidents, who also serve on the LCMS Council of Presidents and its various Committees;

ii) Rev. Dr. Albert Marcis - the LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters and the Commission on the Handbook

iii) Rev. George Dolak (the son of the aforementioned Dr. Dolak) - Commission on Theology and Church Relations

iv) Rev. Dr. William Utech and Rev. Dr. Joel Elowsky - faculty of Concordia Seminary, St Louis MO

v) Rev. Dr. Jaroslav "Jerry" Vajda - pastor, hymn-writer ("See this Wonder," "Go, My Children" and others), and editor at Concordia publishing House

vi) Mrs. Betty Duda – LCMS Board of Directors and LWML President

vii) Mr. John Daniel – LCEF Board of Directors; LCMS Board of Directors

viii) Mrs. Judy Duda – Board of Regents, Concordia University Seward NE

ix) Rev. Dr. Chris Cahill – Board of Regents, Concordia University Mequon WI

x) Mr. Scott Killian, Esq. – Commission on Constitutional Matters

5) The SELC and Mission Work

a) As noted above (3.a.iii.), as a member of the Synodical Conference the SELC participated in the Conference mission / outreach work among African Americans and Native Americans in the Lutheran Colleges in Greensboro NC and Selma Alabama.

i) Note: The first call from the seminary for Rev. George Plvan was to the Lutheran College in Greensboro.

b) Beginning in 1927 the Slovak Synod began to look at mission opportunities in Canada because of the influx of Slovak immigrants there. After some initial explorations, Pastor John Horarik accepted the call to become missionary to Slovak Lutherans in Canada, making his headquarters in Montreal. Eventually, SELC congregations in Canada would also be established in Toronto and several other cities in Ontario.

i) When the Lutheran Church Canada was formed in 1988, Canadian congregations of the SELC and the English Districts were given the individual choices of joining the LCC or remaining in SELC and English Districts. Of these congregations, three remain in the SELC:

(1) *Ascension Lutheran Church in Montreal*. Currently, Ascension serves not only the Lutheran community but also welcomes immigrants from Pakistan, China, and other countries in a multi-ethnic ministry. For a number of years they have also hosted a Chinese speaking congregation in their facility

(2) *St. Paul Lutheran Church in Toronto*. Pastor Ladislav Kozak conducts worship services in Slovak, but also in Polish and occasionally in Russian. He also serves a small group of Slovak Lutherans as a preaching station in Kitchener, Ontario.

- (3) *Nativity Lutheran Church in Kingsville, Ontario.* A small handful of members meet in another church and have been served for a number of years as a preaching station by various pastors.
- ii) Recently, conversations between the Presidents of the SELC District, the English District, the LCMS and the Lutheran Church Canada have taken place regarding the possibility of cooperative work in further missions in Canada.

c) Mission work in the US

- i) For many of its early decades, the "mission work" of the SELC District was focused on unreached groups of Slovaks (as in Canada, 5.b. above); the goal was to encourage them to form congregations and call pastors.
- ii) Sometimes congregations (e.g., Calvary Lutheran Church in Parma OH) would be formed by a core group from an existing church, then encouraged to reach out to people in their communities, regardless of their ethnic background.
- iii) Beginning in the late 1970s, the SELC District began to consider planting churches that would serve their local communities without regard for their ethnic backgrounds.
 - (1) Among these mission congregations were Christ the King in Lodi OH, Holy Cross in Lake Mary FL, Redeemer in Manchester NJ, and Peace in Galloway NJ. Others followed.
 - (2) Several "models" of church planting have been attempted through the years, with varying degrees of success:
 - (a) "Buy some land – call a missionary – subsidize the mission"
 - (b) "Call a missionary (church planter) – subsidize the man – buy some land"
 - (c) "Call a planter – form a pre-school – build the congregation around the pre-school"
 - (d) "Establish satellites from a central location"
 - (e) The current model encourages every congregation to be involved in local church planting, and offers more focused training and mentoring to each congregation depending on their local circumstances (contact Dr Mark Larson)

d) Overseas mission work

- i) SELC members Don and Dini Kovac served for a number of years with Lutheran Bible Translators in Liberia until their relocation to the US
- ii) Currently, the SELC supports the mission ministry of Rev Charles St-Onge at Ascension Lutheran Church in Montreal
- iii) The SELC also currently supports the mission ministry of Rev Prince Rajamony, a church planter in northern India, and Rev Gary Schuske in Germany
- iv) Several SELC congregations offer direct individual support to overseas mission work in a number of fields

6) The SELC and Human Care / The Lutheran Haven

- a) In the 1920's, Lutheran Slovaks living in Cleveland, Ohio, dreamed of building an "orphanage" for children and a "retirement home" for pastors who had limited income. Several of these early settler families moved to Slavia, now part of Oviedo, Florida "to live in the country away from the temptations of the city."

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE SELC DISTRICT

Rev. Dr. Chris Cahill

- b) In 1937, one of these settlers, Mr. Andrew Duda Sr., in gratitude to the Lord for His many blessings, offered the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church (now the SELC District of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod) forty acres of land and \$90,000 for the first two buildings - a home for the elderly and a home for needy, dependent children. The offer was graciously accepted by the Synod. In 1946 at the Synod Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, Articles of Incorporation were approved and a board of trustees was elected. The doors were opened to children and the elderly on May 30, 1948.
- c) Over the years, the Lutheran Haven leadership has responded to the ever-changing challenges of providing appropriate retirement and health care services for their senior residents. These now include independent living, assisted living, memory support, rehabilitation, and home health care. Lutheran Haven Home Healthcare, a certified home care agency, also serves the greater community, and is licensed in Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties.

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As of 2021, the SELC District has 52 congregations in 11 U.S. states and 2 Canadian provinces and has 13,876 baptized members and 11,239 communicants. The district's congregations are concentrated in the Northeastern and Midwestern United States.

Presidents of the SELC (as an independent synod)

- Daniel Jonaten Záboj Laucek 1902–1905
- John Pelikán 1905–1913
- Stephen Tuhy 1913–1919
- J. Pelikán 1919–1921
- John Somora 1921–1922
- Dr. John Samuel Bradác 1922–1939
- Dr. Andrew Daniel 1939–1949
- Dr. Paul Rafaj 1949–1963
- Dr. John Kovac 1963–1969
- Milan A. Ontko 1969–1971

Presidents of The SELC District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

- Dr. Albert M. Marcis, 1972–1997
- Dr. Carl H. Krueger, Jr., 1997–2015
- Andrew J. Dzurovcik, 2015–2018
- Waldemar R. Vinovskis, 2018–present

Some references:

- Dolak, George. *A History of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, 1902-1927*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955
- Porter, Lorle. *The Immigrant Cocoon: Central Europeans in the Cambridge, Ohio Coalfield*. New Concord, Ohio: New Concord Press, 2003.
- <https://selc.lcms.org/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SELC_District_of_the_Lutheran_Church%E2%80%93Missouri_Synod
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synod_of_Evangelical_Lutheran_Churches
- <http://lutheranhaven.org/AboutUs/HavenMission/havenmission.php>