

IECLB - IGREJA EVANGÉLICA DE CONFISSÃO LUTERANA NO BRASIL

EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION IN BRAZIL

Brief history

Until 1822 (year of the Brazilian Declaration of Independence from Portugal) the Portuguese government didn't allow the immigration of non-Portuguese and evangelical people into the country (except for a Swiss group in 1819). But on May 3rd, 1824, some German immigrants arrived in Nova Friburgo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro and another group arrived on July 25th of the same year in São Leopoldo, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Those people, mostly evangelical, formed the first Communities, which nowadays are the body of the IECLB. Other groups arrived. The colony of São Leopoldo grew into a strong basis of Protestantism and became the starting point of a progressive expansion.

The immigrants and later their descendants formed communities characterized by mutual help. As the government often didn't give the necessary support at different areas, as education and health, they did it on their own initiative and made them grow. As they weren't allowed to build places of worship such as churches, the communities built schools, which were also used for worshipping. Therefore, the communities of faith and the schools were bound together.

They kept and developed a spirit of sobriety towards religious subjects, respecting beliefs other than theirs. The Bible, the catechism, songs and prayers fed their faith. Family, associations and choirs were regarded as very important.

As far as wide-reaching ecclesiastical structures were concerned, the first ones were the Synods, each with its own denominational characteristics. The consolidation of the organization and the confessional identity went hand in hand throughout a long time. As a result, the Lutheran became the official expression of the denominational identity of the IECLB, not excluding other theological traditions that were integrated in its universe, but, rather, welcoming them according to this denomination and respecting its contextual peculiarities. The evangelical logistics of inclusion was kept as one of the main stays of this dialogue. This decisively ecumenical Lutheranism encompasses the very own IECLB characteristics.

On October 26th, 1949, the four regional Synods united and formed the Synodal Federation (Federação Sinodal), which didn't have a centralized structure neither its final name IECLB. The "Federação Sinodal" started to perform ecclesiastical functions in the name of the Synods which encompassed it. It asked for its affiliation and was welcomed as a member-church at the World Council of Churches (1950) and the Lutheran World Federation (1952). The unification among the Synods was also sped up by the difficulties caused by the II World War. Victims of an exacerbated nationalism, the communities were often seen with caution and suffered discrimination. But they got over this painful experience and became stronger in their conviction and in their position as citizens and members of the Brazilian people, devoted to this country.

The name "Federação Sinodal" was suppressed in 1968, when the designation Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil-IECLB (which was used together with the name "Federação Sinodal" since 1954) remained. IECLB also created then a national structure, with its head office in Porto Alegre. At this time the work of the IECLB spread over the country because of the inner migrations to the West and North of the country.

With the constitution of a church, which had a national character, the opportunities for missionaries grew stronger, but the challenges also increased. Consciousness about social responsibilities became greater, especially during the military regime. This inclination to see things happening in this context improved the ecumenical cooperation at common causes as human rights, solidarity to the native people, support to small farmers in conflicts at the countryside and cities. Simultaneously, inner movements and theological tendencies appeared which, quite often caused tensions to the unity, something which could be redressed through dialogue.

In 1998 the IECLB adopted a decentralized structure, in which the Synods manage their own areas of jurisdiction. So, the leadership was now nearer to the basis. It adopted also a new system of contribution: communities contribute with 10% of their income to support the Synods and the head office.

The IECLB, organized in thousands of communities and preaching places in the whole country, exercises the general priesthood of all believing, baptized people; numerous groups of women, men, couples and young people help the church.

Along the years, communities of the IECLB welcomed pastors and missionaries from foreign countries, especially from Germany. Their work stimulated their faith and contributed to the edification of communities and the constitution of the IECLB itself. Nowadays, the IECLB has approximately 800 ordained ministers, some of which have also worked, and are still working, in many other countries, strengthening the universal communion. IECLB ordains men and women for the pastoral, diaconal, missionary and catechetical ministries.

Countries of activities

Germany (10 IECLB-Ministers), USA (2 IECLB-Ministers), Argentina (1 IECLB-Minister), Switzerland (1 IECLB-Minister), Ecuador (1 IECLB-Minister), Chile (1 IECLB-Minister), Hungary (1 IECLB-Minister), Canada (1 IECLB-Minister).

Church Leader

Presiding Pastor: Pastor Dr. Nestor Paulo Friedrich
President of the National Church Convention: Dr. Nivaldo Kiister
President of the Church Council: Almiro Wilbert
General Secretary: Deaconess Ingrid Vogt

Membership

According to present statistics, IECLB has 713.000 IECLB members which are connected to a community.

Organizational Structure

In 1998 IECLB adopted a model which is neither episcopal nor congregational, but can be named „synodal“, in which all communities are gathered in parishes, forming 18 Synods.

The communities, through the boards of their councils form the Parish Councils. The community representatives at the Synod Assembly elect the representatives to the Synod Council, the Synod representative at the Church Council and the Presiding Pastor. This is a democratic model, with a representative system of the community members.

The National Church Convention is basically formed by the representatives of the Synods, the members (men and women) of the Church Council and the Synodal Pastors (17 Pastores men and one woman), all of them elected by the representatives of the communities during Synod Assemblies. The origin of its power is consequently in the communities.

The National Church Convention is the supreme body of the IECLB, which edits the basic norms that must be followed by the Communities, Parishes, Synods and the central structure of the church. The Church Council has to control and to regulate these basic norms, and to detail the operational structures of each level.

Another basic characteristic of the model in the IECLB is the fact that the Communities, Parishes and Synods are administratively independent, e.g., the central structure doesn't interfere neither in the election of the board and the councils of the communities, nor in the selection of the Synodal Pastor and the formation of the Synod Councils. However, as a tool to preserve its confessional identity and its organic unity, only the central structure can give qualification to ecclesiastical workers, and also dictate internal regulations.

The National Church Convention, the Church Council, the Synod Assemblies, the Synod Assemblies and the Synod Councils are normally presided by non-ordained people, who are called administrative authorities. The ministers have the duty of the spiritual leadership in the communities and parishes; they are responsible for the execution of procedural norms that emanate from the Synods, the Church Chairmanship and the National Church Convention.

Main areas of work

The purpose of the mission of the IECLB, in accordance to the commandment of the Lord, is: to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to stimulate the personal, familiar and communitarian evangelical way of life; to promote peace, justice and love in society; to participate in the testimony of the Gospel in the country and in the world. The main activity of the IECLB occurs in the communities (1792), preaching places (1134), evangelical schools (57), old age homes (14), social centers (23), hospitals (22) and other institutions (85), mainly through worship services, Bible study, work with children, confirmation classes, religious education, school teaching, work with women, young people, couples, aged people, small farmers, choirs and song groups, visiting groups, work with marginal groups (children and impoverished families, natives), alternative medicine.

Special challenges

- Confessional unity within an increasing religious pluralism;
- Development of a mission plan reaching far beyond the cultural, social, ethnic, gender and geographic frontiers;
- Public responsibility of the IECLB in the Brazilian society;
- Inner dialogues within the IECLB, which are of evangelical character or of other liberation practices;
- Search to self-financial sustainability, based on faith and gratefulness, with the help of human resources, through theological education and continuous Christian education;
- Diaconal work and social commitment, particularly in the areas of education and development.

Three are the priorities of the current Presidency:

- Accompaniment Program of Theological Students
- Accompaniment Program of Ministers
- Pastoral Care
- Evaluation system
- Health Insurance
- Formation of a Fund for home acquisition
- Fund for help in emergency situation
- Qualification to leadership

Involvement in networks or international cooperation

IECLB, which belongs to the Lutheran denomination, is open to ecumenism and is affiliated to the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Latin American Council of Churches, the National Council of Christian Churches and others.

IECLB has inter ecclesiastical agreements with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Church of Norway, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Japan, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mozambique and the Communion of Lutheran Churches in Central America. It also has partnerships with the Gustav-Adolf-Werk, Martin-Luther-Verein, Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionswerk in Niedersachsen und Det Norske Misjonsselskap (Norway).

It also participates in bilateral ecumenical commissions with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IELB) and the Roman Catholic Church.