



## Mission - Foreign & Local

According to the National Church Life Survey, church attendance in the Lutheran Church of Australia has dropped by 18% in ten years (1991 – 2001). Of all the churches only the Uniting Church was able to do worse. By contrast, church attendance in Baptist Churches rose by 9% and in the Assembly of God fellowships attendance increased by 30% over the same period.

Now the absolutely astounding thing to me, is that I cannot perceive a sense of crisis in our church. We keep enjoying our little intellectual-theological discussions and dissertations while our church burns. I can't help thinking of the Titanic and how people used to act before they drowned.

Yes, I am pointing the finger at you! And I am pointing the finger at myself! For I am sitting here smug, unrepentant and comfortable. Please let's take responsibility and not blame the devil or 'the world' unless we first look at the devil in ourselves. Is ruthless honesty possible?

In the growing congregations of other denominations I know, the emphasis on overseas mission is obvious and pervasive. And it's personalized. There is plenty of photographic material displayed. One local church regularly sends self-funding mission teams ("holiday working bees") to various countries.

Overseas and home mission must never be seen as being in some kind of competition. For one feeds the other. Actually, foreign mission has the potential to revitalize our churches just as our dominant New Guinea mission emphasis some years ago used to pay rich spiritual dividends to congregational life right here in Australia. Please consider!

## Becoming a Christian in Bali

Meet Pastor NYOMAN AGUSTINUS, the pastor of the Indonesian Christian congregation in Sydney that joined the Lutheran Church of Australia in 2003.

Pastor Nyoman, his wife Elisabeth, with their girls Listia (5) and Alfionita (2) left Bali mid 2003 to come to Sydney in order to minister to members of the "Indonesian Christian Church in Australia" (GKIA) worshipping there. Pastor Nyoman ministers to a large group of people from all over the huge Indonesian archipelago who now live in Sydney.

Pastor Nyoman is Balinese, a second generation Christian. 2% of the Balinese are Christian, the vast majority is Hindu. Now many Muslims move in from other parts of Indonesia. By contrast, in the Lutheran heartland of Indonesia, North Sumatra, nearly 50% of the population is Christian. They are traditional Christians of the fourth or fifth generation.

Pastor Nyoman pleads with us not just to go to Bali as tourists but also as Christians and as evangelists. Even in Sydney he is focused on the conversion of his own people whom he loves dearly.

"To be a Christian in Bali is very hard," he writes, "especially for a Balinese. It may even cost your life. But if you come to Bali and you are a Christian already, then it doesn't matter."

**His Story.** Pastor Nyoman has a fascinating story to tell about himself and the conversion of his mother. Here is an edited and paraphrased version of his own account:

*In 1967 I was born into a newly Christian family. My family had just converted from Hinduism to Christianity chiefly because of a unique experience of my mother. My mother had been dying, you know. She was very, very sick. She says that one day total darkness surrounded her but then she saw a cross brightening up the darkness. She had wanted to come to the cross but a person stopped her and said, "You cannot come now. You must go back."*

*As she awoke, her family had already gathered for her funeral. Everyone was crying. She said to them, "Why are you crying?" They told her, "You were dead!"*

*The story spread throughout the village and a missionary heard about it, visited my family and explained to my mother that Jesus had revealed his cross to her and had spoken to her. He talked*

*of Jesus as the way to heaven. My mother and my whole family believed and were baptized.*

**Troubled times.** *Now big troubles came. We faced difficulty after difficulty. We were turfed out of our house by my grandparents. We became refugees in our own village. After all, my grandfather had expected me to become a Hindu priest!*

*In those sad days, I was born. The missionary told my parents, "I believe Agustinus will become a church leader." But that seemed most unlikely for a long time. I contracted polio and there was great pressure put on my family to return to Hinduism. "Your son got sick because the gods are angry at you," the people said.*

*As a young man later on I had wanted to become a tourist guide and earn good money. But then the pastor of our church insisted that he had heard God's voice telling him that I had to become a pastor. I said, "No, you may be wrong. I have two brothers who are stronger than I." The pastor simply said, "Please yourself. But you take a big risk with God." Just to please him I sat for the entrance examination of a Bible College. I went totally unprepared and hoped to fail.*

*Well, I passed and finished up at the Ujung Pandang College for the next five years. Then I was made pastor of the biggest church in Bali as well as other churches. Now I am here in Australia for at least two years. God is good.*

**How to win the Balinese for Christ.** If we want to win the Balinese for Jesus, we need to win their children. The Balinese Church usually helps poor families with the school fees for their children. That's the first contact the families have with Christianity and some become Christians later on. In short, *we have to show them God's love in a practical way!*

## **The LCA and World Mission: Time for Change and a New Approach**

Mission is not an optional extra for the church. It is significant that our Lord's last words to his disciples were a commission for mission to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). This means that world mission as part of our total commitment to mission must be given the highest priority in the life of the church.

It is a fact that Lutherans in Australia have a long history of active involvement in mission both at home and overseas. But it is also sadly true that the last twenty years or so have seen a decline in support for world mission on the national level of about 70%.

While I was our church's director for world mission during the nine years 1993-2001 I made several proposals suggesting ways to stop the rot that had

set in our church's support for world mission. In 2003 I presented our church leaders in Adelaide a ten page proposal briefly analysing the current situation, listing some of the major reasons for the decline in support and making a detailed proposal for overcoming our world mission funding dilemma. In a few words, this is the substance of that proposal:

1. The analysis concluded that the situation is now so serious that we need a radical change in our approach to funding this essential ministry (call for a paradigm shift).

2. The biblical basis for the proposal is that world mission is a commission given by Christ to the whole church and all its members and not just a voluntary activity of those who feel like doing this.

3. The aim of the proposal is to give the people of the church (congregations/individuals/schools etc.) greater direct involvement in and ownership of our church's world mission ministry. This would result in increased support for mission.

4. What would be different? Under the present system the LCA receives a budget that pays for all expenses of the world mission ministry (LCA mission office and staff, overseas programmes, board expenses. Most of the funds are channelled through the districts to the LCA). Under the new proposal the LCA would receive a budget only for the mission office and staff and board expenses. This would cut the LCA budget by more than half. Congregations, individuals, schools etc. would choose which world mission projects they wished to support and send their donations directly to the world mission office. The LCA office would coordinate/administer the whole overseas programme of the church. It would also inform the overseas recipients who supports them and direct contacts between donors and recipients would be encouraged. The extent of the programme budget would depend on incoming donations.

5. Some of the advantages of the new system would be:

- greater ownership of world mission programmes and therefore dedicated support.
- personalised, targeted giving to world mission resulting in two-way exchanges.
- stabilising this ministry by giving people a greater say in how to support it.
- congregations would also be able to determine projects of their own.
- streamlined, direct giving to the world mission office.

6. If a new approach is to succeed the LCA would need to:

- wholeheartedly support the change (no half measures, Matthew 9:17).

- provide the world mission office once again with a full time director.
- embark on a regular programme of promotion and visitation in congregations.
- reaffirm its commitment in word and deed to our Lord's commission to evangelise the world and dare to go ahead in faith. Our people's heart for mission is I am sure, as big as ever.

7. Finally. It has been said that there are three phases in mission:

1. It is impossible.
2. It is difficult.
3. It is accomplished.

**Dr Ulf Metzner, Tewantin Qld.**

**Note:** *Dr Ulf Metzner's full submission is available from the editor.*

## **Every Congregation to Develop Mission Partnerships?**

*I am fully behind encouraging our congregations to become more interested in mission beyond their local congregational boundaries. Living Grace (Toowoomba) is in the process of developing a prayer partnership with Hopevale which is not exactly overseas mission but ministry and mission nevertheless. They do need encouragement and renewal and their prayers for us may encourage us also.*

*I have the feeling that mission experts have a limited use in the sense that we cannot leave overseas mission to a few experts who then try to maintain all the necessary relationships with all overseas communities. Every congregation should send people out even if it is only for a few days or weeks. Every congregation should develop partnerships and so on.*

*My proposal is that every LCA congregation starts tithing and out of that tithe funds the general synod and also their own mission efforts. (Not all of the tithe should go to the general synod).*

*You are doing good work which stirs and generates passion.*

**Pastor Dr Edgar Mayer, Toowoomba.**

**Did you know...** at the end of 2003 the total number of Lutheran Christians worldwide in the 136 LWF member churches was 62.3 million as compared to 61.7 two years earlier. Another 3.6 million Lutherans were non-members. Africa, with 1.1 million newly registered members, had the highest growth rate (9.3%). The memberships of the fairly young Lutheran Churches of Rwanda and Malawi doubled in one year (Rwanda: from 7,600 to 17,000; Malawi: from 25,000 to 50,000).

**(Source: LWF Geneva/Sally Lim, Bgk)**

## **Partnership Example "Living Faith" Murrumba Downs Qld**

To make something happen all you need is a single person with faith, vision and commitment. Ask Pastor Robert Erickson of "Living Faith", Murrumba Downs Church, 40km north of Brisbane.

One of his members has just returned from teaching English and German to 50 young deaconesses serving the 3-million member strong Sumatran Lutheran Church (HKBP). The LCA supported Elisabeth Kirschbaumer by accepting her as a Mission Volunteer, a scheme which makes a limited contribution to travel costs. Inspired by the people there and moved to do even more, Elisabeth had planned to return home with extra "luggage" – an Indonesian church worker (guess at whose expense?). However, visa problems put a stop to this temporarily.

Supported by our Mary & Martha's Women's Refuge in Brisbane, Pastor Rob's Church and Primary School last year brought out two Indonesian English teachers and one "legal worker" from the HKBP church. Something similar is planned again for later in 2004.

His church has also fundraised for three Sumatran kindergartens and, in response, received enthusiastic feedback. You should see the lack of equipment of some of these places!

By the time you read these lines, the Rev Willen Simarmata, the HKBP's Executive Secretary, will probably have visited Murrumba Downs. Another Erickson initiative. The whole church benefits from his visit as he was soon asked to go to Adelaide as well.

It all started with Rob and his wife Betsy privately supporting a pastor over there for years and then Rob making two trips to the "Green Island" in the last 18 months. He used his Recuperative Leave to teach English at two HKBP seminaries.

"Finding the money (for projects) is often not a big deal," says Rob, "For example, one member volunteered to raise the money for one of the teacher's airfares. She organised a special sale – and in one day made all the money needed."

Rob points out that he liaises well with the LCA World Mission Office in Adelaide and that his church's budget is not affected by all these additional drives and activities. "On the contrary, it's beneficial," he says, "Our hands-on approach to mission with practical consequences increases members' interest."

Maybe "Living Faith" can show the way. *Now, you go and do – not the same but - likewise!*

# Batak Pastors in Prison

At times the Christian Church is called upon to stand up for its people and the sanctity of creation, God's world. In North Sumatra an international consortium built a large pulp and paper mill at Porsea, near beautiful Lake Toba, employing 3000 people. The company, TPL (Toba Pulp Lestari) even built a big and beautiful church for its workforce and handed it over to the Lutheran HKBP Church!

Yet all Christian Churches, and other religions as well, stand united in their demand to have the mill closed. There have been huge protests and demonstrations, often led by Lutheran pastors. I ran into a protest group of Catholic women. "The mill drains the water out of Lake Toba, poisons our rice fields, kills the fish in the river, and makes our children sick. There is no future for us if we lose our environment," they said.

It's a David and Goliath struggle because money talks. The local media has been bought off by the company. So reports of the protests are suppressed. You have to read the "Jakarta Post" if you want to know what's going on in Sumatra!

An ecumenical, Lutheran-dominated Non-Government Organization (NGO) by the name of KSPPM with headquarters at Parapat, Lake Toba, has taken up the people's struggle. Our friend and former Luther Seminary scholarship holder Rev. Mangisi Simorangkir is Vice Chairman of this NGO.

Some of our pastors were thrown into prison for their troubles and a total of 16 people were still in prison early in 2004. The silence of the world and the international Christian community helps the powerful to squash, and to ignore, the continuing protests. Please pray ...!

## Northern Thailand's "Shin" People – Part II

ASIA FOCUS No. 1 introduced the "Shin" people of Northern Thailand. In the meantime, Simon McKenzie, final year Luther Seminary student, has returned from an exciting visit to Thailand and to these people. He also handed over the outstanding portion of the donation that we in Gympie had promised – about \$1000 towards church building, church extension and sanitation. In this part of the world, \$1000 can just about build a church!

"The Church has now found that the "Shin" people are not really the "Shin" people but the Lua people," Simon says. In the north of Thailand there are dozens of different ethnic groups, a few of them served by our Church.

Simon's guide, the Rev T. Oiwan, formerly bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Thailand

(ELCT) is the spiritual father of these shy, neglected and scarred people. Simon notes his love for the people. "He is truly like a father to them," he says, "they are his children in the best sense of the word. He cares for them and protects them." "They are all so innocent," Simon says.

When the Lua kids first saw this white man Simon, they ran away. Tribes like the Lua are Internally Displaced People (IDP) or refugees who originally were driven out of their ancestral homelands in Burma, Laos or even Thailand itself. They are timid. People from some tribes run for cover if you try to take their picture! "We whites must be very sensitive here. Never come on strong".

The mission among the Lua seems to be progressing well. In 2000 the ELCT started in one village and now expanded to three. There are lots of baptisms.

Simon is keen to return to Thailand. For, he says, "The people are hungry for the Gospel." Maybe God will even call him to be a missionary there.

## The Difference a Computer Makes

In mid 2003 we enabled the Parish School of one of the Lutheran Churches in Padang Bulan (Medan, Sumatra) to purchase its first computer for \$1550.

Writes retired Pastor S. Siregar (former Luther Seminary scholarship holder);  
*"The computer you presented to the School is very meaningful. All letters are now written by computer and official data is now stored in the computer. Before that, the school had to do everything by manual typewriter. Our church next door also uses the computer to prepare the Order of Service for Sundays. We print 2500 copies every week. It is used by both school and church."*  
(Feb. 2004)

**Ed:** *So the computer serves 3000 parishioners and 500 students!*

## "Do I have to be hopeless?" A blind girl's dream

"My name is Ida Rosari Siagian. I have been totally blind since I was a little child because of a high fever I suffered." (*Ed: Blindness contracted in this way, humanly speaking, is a crime against humanity. The perpetrators are the rich nations because it's poverty-induced and is easily preventable*).

Ida continued in Braille, "However, I give glory to God that now I can study at ... (a Blind School at the outskirts of Medan, Sumatra, run by a Lutheran Church). But I cannot stay in this school forever. I would like to continue my studies at the Theological University because I think that my blind eyes are no reason for not telling the Good News. It's a calling of my soul."

"I am not sure how I can make this dream come true because there is no money available for this. Our school cannot pay and my family is poor. That's why I am wondering whether you can find a way of supporting me. I promise that I will do my best." (January 2004)

Ida finishes school in June this year. Her cause is highly recommended by the Director of the Blind School, Rev Abdul Hutauruk who wrote that she is a cheerful, friendly and good girl. She is also bright and intelligent - a high achiever. Last year she topped the school in a writing competition with the theme, "Do I have to be hopeless?"

The money needed for her theological education with a view to serving as a pastor of an Indonesian Lutheran Church is something like \$1400 per year.

If Ida is following the Lord's will for her life, I believe we can find the money. First we need to do a little more research.

## Editor's Letter to the Church, Friends and Supporters

Mission is one of the most exciting things in the world. Foreign mission is something that can give our congregations new wings, especially also country congregations for whom growth and outreach is difficult. Actually, I have to admit; it's easier than home mission because of the huge 'demand' globally.

But it's nothing for the fainthearted! It is nothing for sentimental idealists! For there are lots of traps. There will be disappointments. The potential for misunderstanding is always great. There is the language barrier. Good will and love, by themselves, unfortunately do not suffice.

Yet overseas mission and inter-church aid are a most satisfying venture. I believe we need to tap into the good will of thousands of our people who are keen to help and who also have talents and resources. Let's inspire them!

God's mission and our mission are urgent. If "we want to get mission support in the LCA going again" (W. Zweck), I believe there need to be changes in our approach, and changes quickly. See Dr Ulf Metzner's paper. There is no time to wait for synods to pass motions in two, four or six year's time.

The time for praying, discussing, sweating, organising - and careful consideration and change is right now. The time for action is right now.

My personal efforts are limited. I am a parish pastor. I can only focus on what I think I know. I call this little mag ASIA FOCUS (not FOCUS ASIA for copyright reasons). Actually, my immediate

focus is South-East Asia only. Maybe someone else could start batting for Papua New Guinea or whatever. But all sorts of mission-related materials may be included here. Please contribute!

I admire people like Pastor Stephen Trautwein, Canberra, who plans to take his missionary heart all the way to Africa. I had a request to go to Southern Sudan to film the plight of the churches there. I had to say "no" (In my heart I said "not yet").

The other day Rev Melvin Mueller's Everton Park people came from Brisbane to Gympie for a Leadership Camp. Their response to the videos on Asia I showed them was terrific. Those lay people really want to do things.

I appeal to our Church to make overseas mission a priority again in a new, dynamic way, and to respond to urgent calls to look at the way we do things.

We need to work together all the way so that everything "Adelaide" does is also the work of every pastor and congregation individually in a concrete way and that everything "we" do at the grassroots is also the work of the whole church.

May I propose a meeting in Brisbane some time soon please, at the convenience of the Mission Director and others, to discuss with parish pastors in some depth the yet unsolved and, to me, critically important issues raised.

**Pastor August Fricke, Gympie Qld.**

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### ASIA FOCUS Mission Statement

1. ASIA FOCUS wishes to be a source of inspiration and information about the church in the world, especially the Lutheran Church in our Asian neighbourhood.
2. ASIA FOCUS wishes to encourage congregations, parishes and individuals to take a keen interest in aid and mission projects and consider developing their own initiatives in consultation with the LCA.
3. ASIA FOCUS invites prayer and financial support for its own projects and official LCA mission endeavours to counter the decline in mission support in recent years.

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