



Newsletter Lutheran Study Centre

REFORMATION DAY 2013

at Sabah Theological Seminary, Kota Kinabalu

A word from the director...

Most Lutheran churches worldwide **celebrate the Reformation day** on or around **October 31** in remembrance of the beginning of the Reformation. On this day in the year 1517 Martin Luther wrote to Albrecht, the Archbishop of Mainz, to protest against the sale of indulgences and enclosed his 95 theses. He also nailed them at the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. It was the evening of All Saints Day where the church was opened for display of the large collection of relics to the public. People believed that these relics possessed some magical power to relieve sorrow.

This is 500 years ago. Why should we still celebrate Reformation day?

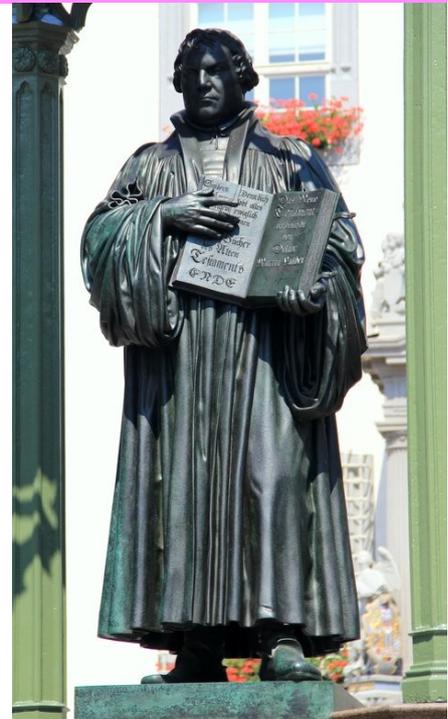
The biblical God is a God of history. He reveals himself in historical events. The presence of Jesus Christ in worship, in the Word and the sacraments, makes present the cloud of witnesses, the faithful of Christian history. Every church is founded by the Holy Spirit on the history of previous Christians in mission, memory and worship.

The Reformation is one of the most important events of God's revelation in history. The church was in danger of losing its origins. The Reformation brought us back to the centre of faith: the Word of God's grace. Even the Catholic Church reformed itself as a result of the

Reformation. Therefore the Reformation remains relevant for the churches, be it in Europe, Asia, Africa or the Pacific. These churches were founded by missionaries in the tradition of the Reformation.

But what is the content of the Reformation? Often this content summarized in the "four sola": We are saved by Christ alone, by grace alone, by scripture alone and by faith alone. While it is true that these terms try to summarize the Reformation theology, the terms on their own can also be misleading. We have to study the texts of the reformers, because the theology cannot be contained in short terms.

The aim of the Reformation was a complete renewal of church and theology based on the Word of God.



Luther statue at the market place of Wittenberg from 1821



The Word of God is the way by which God transforms the world. The Word of God acts in history and changes people, churches and nations.

The proclamation of the Word of God will make us die and rise in Christ. We can only let this happen in faith and trust.

The Reformation means forgiveness of sin, education in the bible,

*Painting:
Luther at the Diet of Worms 1521*



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and responsibility for God's creation and calling in the world. The Reformation established compulsory schooling for all, including girls, and paved the way to the modern world.

The Reformation is never finished. As long as the Word of God is active, it continues to reform and transform churches. The Freedom of a Christian and his responsibility for the world are worth being commemorated. The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is not far (2017).

Michael Press

How do the Lutheran churches in Malaysia and Singapore remember the Reformation?

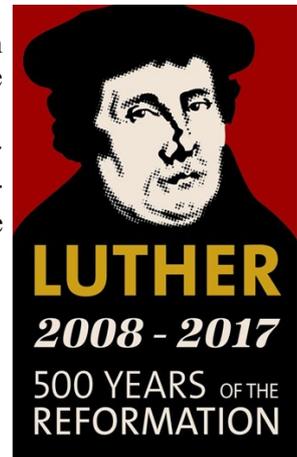


Reformation day service 2011 in Singapore

Being a Lutheran Church with a rich theological and historic heritage, the **Lutheran Church in Singapore** since our constitution in 1997 has celebrated Reformation Day every year as one big family. It is a big significant event on our church calendar. All our Lutheran congregations in Singapore will come together on the Reformation Sunday and have a big celebration.

Each year there is a theme for the celebration such as music or vocation or family and marriage (which is our Reformation Day theme for this year 2013). The celebration may have a service, message by our Bishop or invited speaker, ordination of new pastors, singing, choir presentations, drama skit, food and drinks or exhibition of items portraying the history of Reformation. The venue of our Reformation Day celebration is rotated among our congregations' premises so that all of them feel part of it.

The Reformation Day is very much part of our identity as a Lutheran church, which subscribes



to Lutheran Confessions found in the Book of Concord. We also subscribe to the solas - Sola Fide. Sola Gratia. Sola Scriptura. Solus Christus. We are thankful to God for Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon and others for their contribution to the Reformation of the Catholic Church for the glory of God.

Rev. Martin Yee, LCS



Congregations of the **Lutheran Church in Malaysia** have celebrated Reformation Day in different ways. In the past, some larger congregations had their own individual

commemoration at the evening of the Reformation Day itself (31 October) or at the last Sunday in October.

In order to encourage all congregations to strengthen our common identity as Lutherans, the Selangor District asked the Consultant Wolfgang Grieninger to prepare a series of four topical worship services in the month of October. These related the readings of the Sundays to the topics of the series which related the reformation to today's life.

The first series focussed on Luther's four basic principles of the Reformation. The second series of outlines covered four aspects of the topic "The priesthood of all believers" in church and society.

In other years LCM districts offer their combined reformation service at one of their bigger churches. Guest speakers from overseas partners in USA, Australia or Germany were invited to preach or to give special lectures.



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A few years ago the Selangor District hosted a “Reformation Feast” on the last Sunday in October. After the combined service in the morning the congregation shared a common lunch. The program in the afternoon comprised of a public lecture with discussion, the screening of the movie about Luther’s life, an exhibition of Bibles and a special programme for children.

Rev. Wolfgang Grieninger, Consultant in Lutheran Theology to LCM

Within the **BCCM** family, only certain churches will remember or celebrate Reformation Day. This is mainly dependent on the pastor. I remember that at Bible College there was a gathering of all the Lutheran churches to have a combined Reformation service. However, at my first posting as a pastor, only once did we remember Reformation Day and it was due to the fact that 31st of October fell on a Sunday and so the senior pastor preached a sermon on the 4 “solae” of Martin Luther.

Due to the history of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, we do not often celebrate Reformation Day. However, in the years that I have been in ministry, I have tried to remember it as often as possible. I believe that it is important we remember the spirit of Reformation for it was due to Martin Luther’s understanding of God’s word that prompted his nailing of his 95 theses to the Wittenberg cathedral door in protest of what was happening in the church at his time..

Some pastors would preach a sermon message that mentions Martin Luther and his role in the Reformation during the service closest to 31st October. However, as the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation draws nearer, it is important to tell our



Inauguration service of Bishop Aaron Yap in the Luther Centre of the Lutheran Church of Malaysia, September 1, 2013



BCCM Bishop Thomas Tsen preaching at LSC seminar.

members about the Reformation and remember Martin Luther and what he started as this could be called the beginning of the theology of grace that we almost take for granted today. Being able to read the Bible in our own language is a joy that will always help us to remember that fateful day almost 500 years ago.

Rev. Ngui Au Sze , Labuan BCCM



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Reformation Day is celebrated every 31st of October on a fairly grand scale in the ELCM.

Many congregations in the diocese celebrate the day by holding special Reformation Day services and organising talks on the significance of the Reformation.

The day is celebrated on a grander scale at Zion Cathedral, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur where a combined Reformation Day service, attended by members from all over the Klang Valley, is held in the evening.



A film on the Reformation is normally screened the day before at the Lutheran Hall in the cathedral grounds.

It must also be noted that ELCM members are well known for taking pride in their rich Lutheran heritage. Hence, Reformation Day will always be remembered in a special way in the ELCM.

Rev. Albert P. Abishegam, ELCM

News

More than 100 attend PCS seminar on catechism

The four day seminar on Luther's catechism was attended by more than 100 pastors, preachers, elders and church leaders from the Protestant Church of Sabah (PCS). On four Saturdays in August and September the speakers Dr Michael Press and Dr Eric Trozzo from the Lutheran Study Centre discussed the main parts of the Small and the Large Catechism: The Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's prayer and the sacraments. For many of the participants of PCS it was their first encounter with the catechism. The feedback was very positive. Attempts were made of translating the catechism in the context and situation of the PCS today.

The PCS wishes to strengthen the Lutheran identity of their members and the distribution of a BM and Rungus version of the Small Catechism in bigger numbers will be supported by the LSC.

The four seminars were held at Tinangol bible school through which many pastors of the church have gone and for which the church has great plans of development. Presently there are 5 lecturers and 19 students at Tinangol.





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News and Reviews

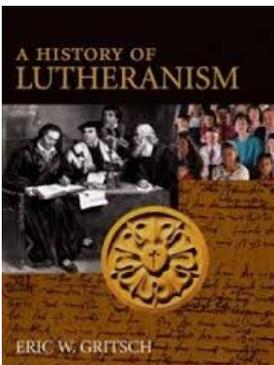
Chinese Lutheran seminar



From **August 15 to 17, 2013** the LSC organized a seminar with the BCCM Chinese General Council. More than 50 participants including six final year STS students and two pastors from the Lutheran Church in Singapore listened to the presentations of Prof. Pilgrim Lo, director of Lutheran studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. A typhoon almost prevented Prof Lo from coming.

The participants appreciated how this seminar strengthened their understanding of Lutheran theology and the tradition of the church. For quite a number of the group, which was comprised of pastors, elders, preachers and missionaries, it was the first encounter with Lutheran theology. The excellent translation of the Book of Concord into Mandarin which had been obtained for each participant from Hong Kong supported the studies.

Book Review



When talking about Lutheran history, we often focus on a few short decades of Martin Luther's life. It is worth remembering that the churches in the Lutheran tradition are nearing five hundred years of growth and development. There is great diversity within this tradition, even as it holds to a common core. Eric W. Gritsch's *A History of Lutheranism* is an incredibly helpful entry-way into understanding the diversity of this tradition. He has managed to present a detailed history that avoids getting bogged down in too much detail, so that the result is a very readable overview of Lutheran history.

What I find particularly helpful in Gritsch's work, however, is the later chapters, especially chapters five and six. Chapter five introduces pietism. This spiritual movement is important for understanding Lutheran missionary history and many aspects of parish ministry. In chapter six, meanwhile, we encounter a rebirth of appreciation for the Lutheran confessions of the 16th century, and their importance for grounding the work of the church in God's grace rather than human actions, even actions that are spiritually motivated.

All in all, Gritsch's *A History of Lutheranism* is quite helpful in understanding the development of the wide range of churches that make up the Lutheran tradition. In particular, I recommend it for those seeking to understand where their own understandings and experiences fit within the Lutheran family tree. (Eric Trozzo)

Upcoming LSC Events in 2014:

February 17-19 : *Lutheran Theology with Buku Konkord (BCCM BM)*

February 20-22 : *Lutheran Theology with Buku Konkord (PCS)*

June 22-27: *Lutheran Theology for Chinese students at STS*

January to June: *Courses on the Catechism for PCS and BCCM BM districts*