



LUTHERAN
CHURCH
OF AUSTRALIA

INTERNATIONAL MISSION

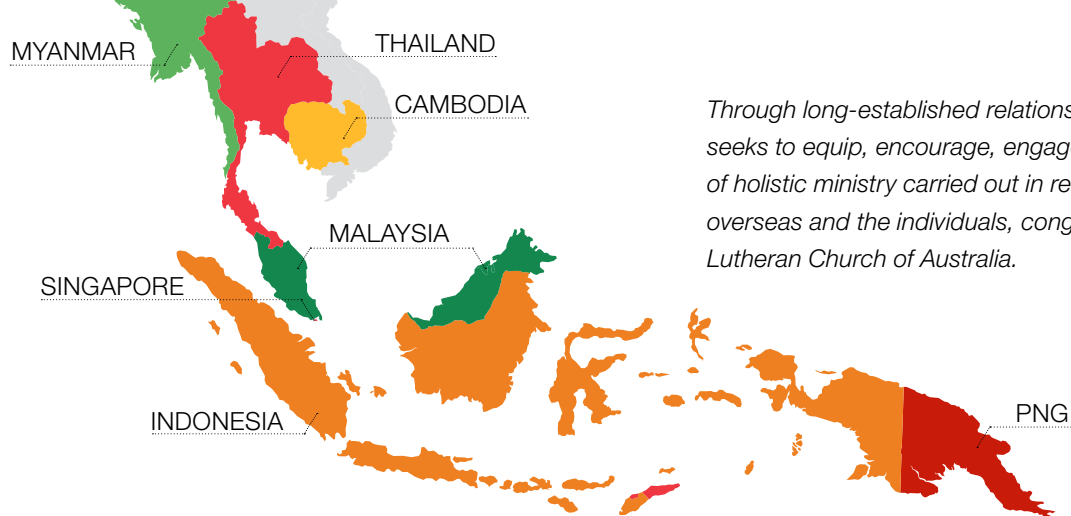
BORDER CROSSINGS



global partners · local church

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31



Through long-established relationships, LCA International Mission seeks to equip, encourage, engage in and support the growth of holistic ministry carried out in relationship with our partners overseas and the individuals, congregations and districts of the Lutheran Church of Australia.



Pastor Matt Anker

Assistant to the Bishop
– International Mission
Lutheran Church
of Australia

OUR ROLES MAY CHANGE BUT THE GOSPEL REMAINS

The church's mission across the ages remains unchanged. It is our joyful responsibility to reach out with the message of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins to all people so that they might come to faith in Jesus and so be saved. The story of the LCA's role in this work, however, changes constantly as the needs of the churches we work with change.

This overarching story of adaptation to the needs of mission is reflected in the articles in this edition of *Border Crossings*. In years gone by, the words 'mission' and 'missionary' conjured images of brave men and women, working in exotic and dangerous locations, sharing the good news of God's love to people who had never heard it before. Such an image may well fit the early work of the late Rev Dr Joe Strelan in Papua New Guinea, whose service is remembered in this edition.

However, even in Joe's time, the role of missionaries began to change. Recognising that locals are the best missionaries in their own culture, foreign missionaries increasingly took on the role of theological educators and Bible translators. And just as Joe transitioned to be a formative influence at Martin Luther Seminary in Lae, this missional work of theological education remains one of the greatest gifts we can offer our partners. This is borne out by the enthusiasm with which the Lutheran Study Centre in Indonesia has been received under the early guidance of Pastor Graham Harms.

In this edition of *Border Crossings*, we also see the next change in direction for foreign missionaries. As Hanna Schulz serves as a consultant for Wycliffe Bible Translators, her role is not so much translation, but more to mentor locals who know their language better than anyone and will be future teachers, as you can read in these pages.

Whether our overseas partners need evangelist missionaries, teaching missionaries, or mentor missionaries, the joy is that each of these contributes to the call of the gospel into the lives of the people being served. I hope you are encouraged as you read how the culmination of each of these aspects of mission has brought forgiveness and hope to a young woman, Khun Neun, in northern Thailand. After all, her story is the ultimate reason we do any of this on your behalf.

In this edition, we are also trying something different by including a story of how God is building his church in another part of the world and the unique challenges faced there. We hope that you will be encouraged by what the Holy Spirit is doing in suburban Berlin and be prompted to pray for this vital ministry of the gospel.

TRANSFORMED
BY THE

• GOSPEL •

Lua people learn about free gift of life

by Erin Kerber

Khun Neun leads us through the village of Ban Pakho where she serves as an evangelist with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. There are 20 houses in this village, with seven to 10 people living in each house. The Lua people are a minority ethnic group native to Laos. Ban Pakho is situated in the Nan Province, which is rich in natural resources, such as jungle, dense forests, teak woods, waterfalls and wild animals. They live a basic and sustainable lifestyle, growing their food, tending livestock and building their own homes.

As she introduces us to some local people, Neun's connection with them is obvious. She visits several times a week and spends time encouraging locals with words from Scripture and prayer. Neun was an evangelist long before she had the opportunity to study the Bible. She prayed she would learn about God's word and, after many years, God answered her prayer. She was given a scholarship to study

theology at the Lutheran Seminary of Thailand in Bangkok. There she was immersed in the Bible and found peace not only for herself but also for the people she is joining in God's mission to reach.

While reading about Jesus' life on earth, Neun noticed that he was born in a lowly stable, that he spent time healing – not just the wealthy women and men, but the blind and the sick and those living in poverty. Although the Lua people are poor, Neun discovered that Jesus is for them. She came to realise that she can share the assurance she has because God wants us exactly as we are. He wants to clothe us with His gracious mercy, forgiveness, and love through Jesus Christ. Neun realised that Jesus wants all people, including the Lua people, to be in that great multitude with him in eternity, where there will be no more hunger or thirst.

Neun watches, prays and marvels as she sees how the great God himself came to us as a tiny baby, grew up,

suffered and died and rose again for us. Before Neun became a Christian, she felt like she had no meaning. Now she knows the meaning of life because she knows she has life in Jesus Christ. Neun wants others to know the good life in Jesus and her encouragement to the Lua people can be an encouragement to us, too. To surrender to God's will. To listen to him. To believe him. To trust his faithfulness.



How are we joining with God as he transforms people through the gospel?

LCA International Mission supports the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand as they train evangelists to share about Jesus with the Lua people.

How can you support this work?

If you would like to support the Lua evangelists serving in Northern Thailand, please refer to the donation form on the back of this edition.

TRAINING
IN THE

◦ **GOSPEL** ◦



WE NEED YOUR HELP TO SHARE GOD'S WORD

by **Hanna Schulz**

Mea duoduo! Good morning! For the past five years, I have been privileged to be a translation advisor to the Kope people of Gulf Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG). I am not the translator, the Kope translation team members do that work. They are, after all, the experts in their language. I am the advisor to the team, training and supporting them in their work.

The area of PNG where I work is a delta, as several big rivers drain from the Highlands to the sea, tied together by many smaller waterways. In this delta area, Kope is just one among more than a dozen languages spoken. I recently travelled these rivers, visiting five of these language groups and asking them what made it difficult for them to use the Bible. Among the most common responses were: 'English is hard to understand, we need the Bible in our own language.' 'The Bible is hard to understand, we need people to teach us more about God.'

'Many people in our community cannot read well.'

Hearing these comments in village after village made my heart heavy.

What can we do? I believe the way forward is through training. If vernacular literacy teachers are trained so that people can learn to read their own languages, they then have a better chance of success at learning to read national languages. The way forward includes training Christians about the Bible to deepen their understanding and training people in Bible translation.

What is the first step in this big vision? It's a dedicated space in which to do training. In consultation with the Kope translation team, we are planning to build a Translation and Literacy Training Centre in Ubuo, the village where I live and work. The building will have a classroom for 50 people, plus two offices and a storeroom.

Can you help me to build this training space?

We already have the land and the plans and we have drawn up a budget – although the falling Australian dollar and closure of the local timber mill keep changing it. We also have a timeline to build in October, but we need money for this expensive undertaking.

Keito hi'a-ka! Thank you very much! Thank you for your gifts and your prayers as I continue to work alongside the Kope people in Bible translation and as we reach out to our gulf delta neighbours to offer them the training they have requested.

How are we training
in the gospel?

LCA International Mission partners with Wycliffe Australia to support Hanna Schulz as she serves in linguistics and translation in Papua New Guinea.

How can you support this
training in the gospel?

If you would like to support the building of the Translation and Literacy Training Centre in Ubuo, please refer to the donation form on the back of this edition.

PROCLAIMING
THE

GOSPEL



PASTOR, MISSIONARY, TEACHER

A tribute to John Strelan

by Rev Dr Dean Zweck

Many readers would know that one of our former missionaries, Rev Dr John Strelan, died recently. 'Joe', as he was usually known, was called to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to serve in the Australian Lutheran Mission.

In his own words Joe was, at the beginning, 'young, unmarried and ignorant'. His first assignment (1962 to 1965) was as a circuit missionary at Kwaikuma in the Menyamya region. That was a tough assignment for a young single fellow, pictured here on a big day of baptisms in one of the villages.

Joe addressed the 'unmarried' issue when he met Bronwyn Burgess at an in-service training weekend. Bronwyn was an Australian teacher working on Siassi Island and the couple were married just six months after their first meeting. They had four children and she was by his side throughout the remainder of his life.

Joe was then called to the newly formed Martin Luther Seminary (MLS) at Lae. He served as Lecturer from 1966 to 1984, Librarian from 1968 to 1980, Vice-Principal from 1973 to 1976, and Dean of Studies from 1973 to 1980. He helped train a generation of pastors, teachers and church workers. The MLS Library is named for him, and rightly so, because he founded it and built up the collection.

Joe was passionate about theology in the PNG context. He was on the team that prepared Tok Bilip Bilong Yumi ('Our Faith') – a confessional document that helped create and maintain doctrinal unity among Lutherans in PNG. He wrote a book called *Search for Salvation*, which deals with proclaiming the gospel in the context of indigenous aspirations for deliverance and wellbeing. He also wrote two commentaries on the Book of Revelation, one in Tok Pisin and one in English. Joe had a way of using words that could convey complex theological ideas in language that is easy to understand.

After the Strelans returned to Australia, Joe served as Lecturer in New Testament and Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary (1986 to 1997), and for most of that time was also First Vice-President of the LCA. Joe spent the last three years of his active ministry as a parish pastor at Port Macquarie in NSW.

The gospel shone through in all Joe's preaching and teaching and in his life. His greatest gift was his unshakeable belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives.

*Based on the obituary prepared by
Rev John Strelan Jr*

How are we
joining with
God as he
transforms
the gospel?

**LCA International
Mission is supporting
Australian Mick Hauser,
who is serving as a
lecturer at Martin
Luther Seminary, Lae,
Papua New Guinea.**

How can
you support
this work?

**If you would like to
donate to the work
Mick is doing in
fellowship with our
brothers and sisters
in the Evangelical
Lutheran Church of
Papua New Guinea,
please refer to the
donation form on the
back of this edition.**

STORIES OF MISSION

◦ TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH ◦

AROUND THE GLOBE

REVIVAL AND PERSECUTION – IN ONE!



Rev Dr Gottfried Martens is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin-Steglitz, a member congregation of Germany's Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK).

Over the past 12 or so years this congregation has welcomed hundreds of converts to Christianity, mostly former Muslims living in Germany as Iranian and Afghan refugees.

The Trinity congregation is focused on its calling as a mission church, holding regular baptismal instruction with Farsi translation, Persian Bible studies, prayer services and community outreach taking place almost daily, along with care of and advocacy for the community.

As the gospel has been proclaimed, the Holy Spirit has daily added to their number so that they now total more than 1500 souls.

But it is not all 'beer and skittles'.

As shocking as it is, many of these new Christians are subjected to persecution and beatings at the hands of Muslim extremists among the refugee population in Germany, who despise their conversion.

But more shockingly, Dr Martens says they are now having their faith questioned, belittled and disregarded by the State.

Late last year, he released his annual circular highlighting systemic discrimination in Germany when deciding the refugee claims of Iranian and Afghan converts to Christianity. 'The acceptance rate for Christian refugees is being further and further reduced for political reasons', Dr Martens writes.

Converting to Christianity is a punishable offense in Iran and Afghanistan resulting in imprisonment or execution. And yet, despite these very real dangers, he says German courts are increasingly rejecting the refugee claims of

Christian converts from these countries and sending them back to face persecution.

Dr Martens says judges set their own standards for what constitutes Christian belief when ruling on the sincerity of a convert's faith and regularly ignore the testimony of the applicant's pastor.

'State officials determine what the "right" Christian belief is ... and determine who is a "serious" Christian', he writes.

He recounts one refugee who movingly testified that he could not live without receiving the body and blood of Christ, but the judge declared this as irrelevant to Christian faith. Dr Martens says 'the judge stated that it was "not understandable" why the reception of the sacrament should be so important', and that the Christian faith was instead merely about 'values and rules'.

'Of course, there are also courts that, thank God ... make their decision largely dependent on the pastor's deposition', Dr Martens writes. But it appears that too often whether or not a refugee Christian convert in Germany gets a reasonable judge and a fair hearing is a pure lottery.

Despite these challenges, Dr Martens considers the ministry to which he has been called 'the most beautiful service in the world, which I would never exchange for anything else'. And he asks us to 'pray above all that those who have found their way to our congregation in the last years may continue to hold to Christ and not let their love for their Lord falter'.

Based on articles written by Dr Martens and Matthew Block (Lutheran Church Canada) and printed with permission. For more information visit www.lcamission.org.au/2020/06/17/revival-and-persecution-in-one/



TEAMING UP FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

by Graham Harms

It is common knowledge that Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world. What is less well known is that they also have the fourth largest Lutheran population. There are 13 Lutheran synods in Indonesia concentrated mostly in North Sumatra and a total of more than 6 million members.

All these churches belong to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) but most of them recognise that their theology and practice diverge from the Lutheran tradition. This is not uncommon – all Lutheran churches, including our own, struggle with the temptation to become moralistic, even legalistic, and snuggle up to the law. The churches have therefore expressed a desire to deepen their understanding of Lutheran theology and to identify more closely with the Lutheran tradition.

In collaboration with LWF and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), our church is helping to sponsor the development of a Lutheran Study Centre (LSC) to support these aims. A local pastor, Dedi Pardosi, has been appointed as coordinator and the ELCA is searching for a suitable theologian to join LSC as expat professor.

I came on board to fill that role until a permanent replacement arrives. I went to Sumatra at the end of January this year. Unfortunately, my stay was cut short by the coronavirus pandemic, but the work continues, with my support from a distance.

LSC aims to help the churches discover the depths of the Lutheran understanding of the gospel as central to Christian theology. None of the four seminaries has a lecturer dedicated to the teaching of Lutheran theology. Helping the students and faculty develop a deeper sense of God's grace in Christ would be a major contribution to the ministry and mission of the gospel in this land.

So far, we have consulted with seven of the churches and all four seminaries, and all have asked us to conduct seminars, training and conferences for all their leaders so that they can be better equipped to serve with the gospel.

There is much yet to be done, but LSC will help the 13 synods work more closely together on what matters most. It's a big job and there is a long way to go, but

with God's help, LSC promises to be a worthwhile contributor to the life of the church in Indonesia. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to be associated with it and urge you all to support LSC and these Lutheran churches in your prayers.

How are we joining
with God partnering
in the gospel?

LCA International Mission is working in collaboration with our partners to develop the Lutheran Study Centre to strengthen the churches in the proclamation of the gospel.

How can you
support this work?

If you would like to donate to the Lutheran Study Centre in Indonesia, please refer to the donation form on the back of this edition.



I'M JOINING IN GOD'S MISSION BY *praying for*

- the building of a translation and literacy training centre in Ubuo, Papua New Guinea, as a space to host literacy and Scripture Use workshops, and in which local translation and literacy teams can work
- the family of Dr Joe Strelan, who are mourning his death. Praise God for his life, knowledge and gifts, which he shared with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG to the extension of God's kingdom
- access to Biblical training for Lua evangelists to share the hope they have in Jesus with those living in their communities in northern Thailand
- Pastor Graham Harms and those involved with the Lutheran Study Centre. May it be a place where Indonesian churches discover the freedom and joy of the Lutheran understanding of the gospel
- Rev Dr Gottfried Martens and members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin-Steglitz Germany and, in particular, new Christians from Iran and Afghanistan among their community being persecuted for their faith

Prayer is so important because many of our partner churches are working in new territory for the kingdom of God and spiritual attack is their everyday reality.

To download monthly prayer points, go to www.lca.org.au/international-mission/join-gods-mission/pray/

They can also be accessed via the LCA International Mission eNews – to sign up, go to www.lca.org.au/enews

'Lord, renew your church, begin with me!'



I'M JOINING IN GOD'S MISSION BY *volunteering*

AUSTRALIA

LCA International Mission hosts guests from overseas in a unit in North Adelaide. Up to six times a year, we would appreciate assistance in cleaning the unit between guests. Cleaning products are supplied.

MALAYSIA

The Lutheran Church in Malaysia (LCM) is seeking IT support personnel in the areas of graphic design, web design, copyright and content creation to assist its congregations to go digital.

What to do next ... If you would like to know more about volunteering in mission overseas, go to www.lca.org.au/international-mission or contact Nevin Nitschke at nevin.nitschke@lca.org.au or lcaim@lca.org.au or phone **08 8267 7300**.

You can experience firsthand how God's love is coming to life through the word-and-action gospel work of our partner churches.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Being a volunteer Congregational Representative for LCA International Mission in your home congregation involves encouraging others in mission by sharing resources with your congregation and promoting LCA International Mission opportunities. Information is regularly emailed to LCA International Mission Congregational Representatives to help them in their role.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

LCA International Mission wants to put together resources for volunteers to use when they are teaching English overseas. This is ideal for people who have some experience with teaching English as a second language.



I'M JOINING IN GOD'S MISSION BY *giving to...*

... LCA International Mission's work with our partner churches

(Please indicate the ministries and programs you would like to support and write the amount of your gift/s in the spaces provided.)

- ☐ Lua evangelists serving in northern Thailand \$ _____
- ☐ Building of a translation and literacy training centre in Papua New Guinea \$ _____
- ☐ The Lutheran Study Centre in Indonesia \$ _____
- ☐ Mick Hauser, serving as a lecturer at Martin Luther Seminary in Papua New Guinea \$ _____
- ☐ I would like to leave a bequest for LCA International Mission in my will (please send me information)

**Please send this completed form to
LCA International Mission
197 Archer Street, North Adelaide SA 5006**

- ☐ Please send me a receipt

We take great care of your financial gifts.

You can be confident they will assist our partner Lutheran churches to bring the good news of Jesus to their communities.

You can support one or more of the above mission projects in any of the following ways:

- ☒ online at www.lca.org.au/international-mission/act-now/donate/ (credit card)
- ☒ OR fill out the form below (credit card or cheque)
- ☒ OR Electronic Funds Transfer; please contact LCA International Mission on **08 8267 7300** for more details
- ☐ Enclosed is my cheque for \$ _____ (cheques payable to LCA International Mission)
- ☐ Please debit my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Card no

Expiry / CCV

Amount \$ _____

Name _____ Signature _____

Address _____ P/C _____

Email _____