

Doctor of Ministry Program

Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools.

Towards Strengthening Mutual Understanding in Ministry

Project I Report

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As I begin to report on the above project, it is important for me to mention the fact that this has been one project that I have enjoyed working on. The reasons for this were many, one of which was very comforting for me and is hopeful for our future together. This is contained in one of the ELCA's mission document under the title:

Accompaniment, the ELCA's missiological vision concepts. It reads:

“We understand accompaniment as walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. The basis for this accompaniment, or what the New Testament calls Koinonia, is found in God- human relationship in which God accompanies us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit”. (Global Mission in the 21st Century, A Vision of the ELCA/DGM). Published in October 1996.

From here on, this document informed most of my research undertakings. I read it repeatedly and found a lot of connections as to how we in Africa are thinking of partnerships today. The document uplifts the “Theme”- walking together in the 21st Century from the biblical story- “on the road to Emmaus”, Luke 24: 13-35, when at the end of the day's journey, the companions break bread together. The model as far as I could read tries to avoid terminology's that would imply mission as a conquest by other nationalities thereby making others mission objects. Something no longer needed today. I therefore very much like this approach as it respects all God's people as having a mission to one another thereby encouraging mutual respect for all parties as they accompany one another. This lays a good foundation for understanding our companion. Moreover, as we will see, we all have a lot to offer to one another much more than we are aware. This knowledge can motivate us and strengthen our togetherness in mission. The document offers a good basis for justifying what we are doing and offers useful guidelines for our partnership in mission.

The weak areas of the document.

While the document “Global Mission in the 21st Century” has a lot of good points for our walking together, the document fails to see mission as an obligation and compelling for the partners. It offers its helpful insights for those who choose to engage themselves in mission together, but does not really challenge them to look at mission and our walking together as an obligation we have for one another. I would have appreciated more emphasis on the basis of the great commission that, these relationships are not a matter of choice but are indeed a matter of life or death for the people of God. “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” The love of God compels me/us

Paul writes: The church does not have a choice; rather it has an obligation to engage in a life-giving mission with the people of God. It is called to a partnership with Christ and with one another for the sake of the gospel.

Values of the Ministry and Why we should be Compelled

We should be compelled because Christ was compelled. If Jesus was here today which indeed is the case by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the churches - he would be compelled. The spiritual coldness in the churches of the rich countries should compel us. More and more churches are becoming empty. You can hardly see youths being active as they used to. The materialistic life in rich countries is eating up the spirituality of the people that we used to know in the former years. There is very little hope for spiritual renewal.

On the other hand, we should be compelled by the situation of poverty in the poor countries, which has become a stumbling block to the understanding of the love of God for all humanity in the world. The situation is becoming more and more hopeless. Poverty and disease working side by side continues to degrade and to take the lives of both children and adults. While the world overall has become more prosperous over the past thirty years, the average income per head in Africa has actually fallen. Nearly half of the 600 million people in the Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than one dollar per day. An African child dies every three seconds. Two hundred million have no access to healthy services. Over 20 million African have since died of Aids in the last two decades with three quarters of all world HIV/AIDS cases being on the African Continent. Life expectancy is way below forty and annual capital income is less than \$200 per household. Can we as the church sit and watch life being lost in this way and do nothing. What would that speak of us?

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM) as a partner with most Lutheran Churches in the world believes that this situation must not be allowed to prevail. As a church of Jesus Christ, we have the good news of hope to share. It is the good news that "God loved the world and gave his only SON to save it. That man shall not live by bread alone, that there is life after death. ELCM therefore feels compelled to preach the good news of hope to all people who suffer HIV/AIDS and is committed to an intensified prevention campaign, care for the affected. My previous research on "Breaking the Churches Silence" on issues related to HIV/AIDS revealed that there is a clear link between poverty and diseases including HIV/AIDS. The same link can also be easily seen linking malnutrition in under five year old children to many other killer diseases including Malaria. Malaria still kills many children and yet it is both preventable and curable. This can underline poverty as the major root cause of so much suffering on the African Continent. Our partnership together may not solve all these problems, but it would begin to reverse the situation for the better. **Again, for most African churches, these relationships are indeed a matter of life or death. This is not so as others may imply that sometimes they would give financial and material help, but rather so because the African churches and people need to know that somebody somewhere knows, cares and prays for them. This knowledge alone can be life giving and a reason to go on. We need to walk together in the 21st Century; we do not have a choice. We have an obligation to one another, just as Christ has to all of us.**

John 3:16

“God Immanuel is here among us”. We are given to one another so that we may be Immanuel to one another. Our relationship is rooted in the love of God. His commandment is that we love one another. When we do, we fulfill his law.

The Context:

I. The African, Malawian Context.

a). The Country Profile.

Geography and Location

Malawi is a small country located in the Southern Eastern part of Africa. It is landlocked with varying terrain across it. Sharing borders with it is Zambia to the West, Tanzania to the North and Mozambique to the East and South. Malawi covers an area of 118,480 sq. km. It's capital is Lilongwe. Malawi's major geographic features are the mountains, rivers, and Lake Malawi, which covers over 1/4 of the country.

People and Economy

Malawi has a population of 10 million with ethnic groupings and languages. More than 80% of the people are Christians comprising of 60% Protestants and 20% Catholics. The remaining 20% comprise 15-18% Muslims and 2-5% belong to traditional indigenous beliefs and other religions.

As a landlocked country, Malawi's economy is predominantly based on agriculture, which accounts for 45% of gross National Product and more than 90% of the country's export earnings. 80% of the agricultural produce comes from smallholder farmers on customary land. The main crops grown are maize, tobacco, tea, sugarcane, groundnuts, cotton, wheat, coffee, rice, and soybeans. It is important here to note that Malawi is mainly an exporter of primary produce (raw materials) and a net importer of industrial goods (finished products). Malawi therefore is one of the world's poorest countries. The UNDP 1999 Human Development reports per capita income at approximately \$169.00 US with more than 60% of the population living below the poverty datum line of about \$40.00 per capital income. Life expectancy is estimated at 45 years and falling. The illiteracy rate is estimated at 56%. Infant mortality is alarmingly high. Malaria kills most children below the age of 5 years while HIV/AIDS has taken its toll on the productive middle ages.

b). Profile of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM).

Historical Background - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi was founded November 21, 1982

by lay people who had become Lutherans while working in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Finding little comfort in the existing Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia and Malawi), the mission field of the conservative Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), they longed for the Lutheranism they were used to in those countries. The group, led by Mr. Gilbert Msuku who had been in Tanzania for over twenty years, founded the ELCM. The church, which began without any pastors or missionaries, grew so rapidly that it had to request pastoral leadership from those churches in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. These arrangements continued until 1987 when the ELCM ordained its first three pastors. Currently the church has approximately 30,000 members in more than 160 congregations with nearly thirty pastors serving 26 parishes scattered throughout the country. ELCM elected its first Bishop in 1995 and is governed by the church-wide assembly, which elects church officers and a church council empowered to set policy and make decisions between the assembly meetings. The church's officers are in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. Evangelism and lay leadership training is top priority for the ELCM. Backbone to these activities is its strong women's group and the youths as pioneers of the outreach program based on Bible studies and songs (music). Each congregation has its own outreach program. Women groups lead the church effort in alms giving and caring for the sick and the needy. The youth on the other hand are responsible for work among Sunday School Children.

Right from its inception, ELCM took social improvement as its prime concern. Parallel with preaching and teaching the gospel, ELCM has been deeply involved in the social well being of its members and the citizens of Malawi. A small rapidly growing church, the ELCM is an active member of various ecumenical organizations both locally and internationally to the point that its impact has been felt as a partner in the gospel and a counterpart on the effort to bring about peace with justice in the suffering world today. The creation of the Office of the Bishop in 1995 has strengthened the unity of the ELCM and its growth throughout Malawi.

The Context

The context as described above provides the opportunity for the ELCM's ministry to be holistic in nature. Most of its members live in rural areas and are generally poor. The situation has been worsened by the presence of the killer diseases such as HIV/AIDS which is killing mostly productive middle aged people, and Malaria which kills mostly children under the age of 5 years. In addition to the primary responsibility of preaching the word of God, the ELCM can also be described as the voice of the voiceless and an advocate of change for the betterment of those marginalized in society—the poor (usually orphans). In this regard, and for the sake of these young children, the church feels compelled to operate **hope projects** such as: feeding centers for Aids orphans and small scale income generating projects for widows.

Other projects include:

- Adult education for women and men who cannot read and write
- Provision for clean water wells in villages
- HIV/AIDS care and prevention messages for all ages especially the youth (both girls and boys)
- Skill training for women and young people
- Feeding centers for under-nourished children (orphans) and the needy children in general
- Primary schools and the Girls Secondary school in Bwengu
- Home economics for women and primary health care in general
- Family health care and education on family planning
- Care practices and many others such life improving projects. The mobile clinics will strengthen these services in all of the three regions of Malawi.

The Research

The first part of the research was carried at the gathering of all Pastors, Evangelists, parish social workers and office staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi gathering for their annual retreat at the church's Central offices in Lilongwe-Malawi. Dates November 23-25, 2001.

The following questioner was developed and used.

Summarized findings of a research carried out at the pastors retreat in Lilongwe- Malawi, Nov 23-24, 2001

Note:

Q= question

R= response

Anticipation's of a Sister Congregation Relationship

Q 1. What do you hope to gain from a relationship with a congregation in the USA?

R. To learn from their long experiences of being

- a. Christian in a free democratic nation, which is also rich.
- b. How they make their congregations quite independent.
- c. How they are able to minister in such a materialist country.

Q 2. What are your hopes and dreams about such a relationship?

- R. a. to grow together and experience one another's love for Christ.
- b. To learn to understand each other's needs
- c. To try and help each other with our needs.

Q 3. How do these hopes and dreams relate to your faith? The faith of your congregation?

- R. We all seem to be of one mind. We have same hopes and same dreams. Our faith is strong when we are one together. We want to do this because we think Christ is inviting us into this partnership.

Q 4. What joys are you anticipating?

- R. The joys of being accompanied. The knowledge that some other people out there do keep us in their prayers is a source of great encouragement for us. It gives us joy and hope.

Q 5. What fears do you have?

- R. We fear that this joy might be short lived. Our friends in the USA might see us as a burden to them due to our regular financial/economic hardships.

Q 6. What will enable you to more fully enjoy and develop this relationship?

- R. We think we equally have a lot to offer. Our churches are growing and our people are very active. We have a lot of spiritual will to develop further this relationship.

Q 7. Are you and your congregation prepared for this journey? How will you help others in your congregation?

- R. We are prepared to begin to walk together. Face the challenges together and see what the Lord will do for us together. From here, we will help our members to understand what we are going into.

Q 8. What practical things do you anticipate doing to establish and carry on a meaningful sister relationship?

- R. We are prepared to write letters of faith about our lives and ministry here, and also visit and host those who will come to visit us. We will use whatever we have to host our guests here.

Q 9. What resources will help you?

- R. Land. We will farm and grow our crops for food. So that when our visitors come to visit us, there is something for them to eat. Where possible we will have them in our home and give them gifts.

Conversation - following these research findings, I engaged the group into some follow up discussions.

The following is a summary of what resulted from the conversations:

- A. The ELC-Malawi anticipates a lot from the relationship. It sees the opportunity for sharing gifts.
- B. ELC-Malawi is greatly motivated to know that others as far as the USA are interested in them in the name of Christ.
- C. The knowledge that “we as Lutheran Christians” have brothers and sisters all over the world is of particular interest, and offers a lot of hope for a better future.
- D. They are eager to discover what it is like to be a Christian in another country other than ours.
- E. Very willing to have friends and ready to host visitors thereby sharing their faith with them.
- F. ELCM members are overjoyed by the fact that they can share with others its joy and sorrows, knowing that others are willing to listen and pray for them.
- G. The leadership has resolved to commit itself for the good of the companionship. They are not so sure if their counterpart is equally committed in the same way and fears should the relationship not last. Fear of the unknown or fear of being misunderstood or of some biasness for the African people by the rich nations in general.
- H. Expecting to learn more about the Christian faith in the world.

The ELCA - A History of the companion relationship between the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, Africa.

Back ground

The relationship between the two churches began as a tiny seed in October 1991, when the teaching staff from St. Paul’s Christian Day School, Michigan City, Indiana, attended the annual fall conference of the American Lutheran Education Association at Techny Towers, north Chicago, Illinois. One of the guest speakers at the conference was the Rev. Joseph P. Bvumbwe, then Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM), who was working toward a master’s degree at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. The staff decided that they must get Pastor Bvumbwe to come to the churches of Michigan City, at least to St. Paul’s and to Lutheran Church of The Dunes (LCD), because one of the staff, Kathy Oelschlager, kindergarten teacher there for fifteen years, was from LCD where her husband, Harold, was pastor. Pastor Bvumbwe actually came to Michigan City in January 1992, and preached at both St. Paul’s and LCD. However, once was not enough, so the staff, spearheaded by Naomi Kienitz and her husband Neil, brought the Bvumbwe family back to Michigan City in March two months later. The Kienitz’s in making the trip to Dubuque actually grazed a guardrail with their van due to slippery roads with the family aboard including six-month old Chikumbutso and safely brought the family to Michigan City. So, began a relationship that grew, slowly but surely. St. Paul’s, a congregation of 2000 members, immediately pledged to build a chapel for a congregation of 350 members, stayed in

touch and prayed. St. Paul's also sent Pastor Bvumbwe back to Malawi in June with a camcorder. Also, the two oldest children returned the next fall to attend the Christian Day School, again due to the leadership of Naomi Kienitz and the school staff. Support from St. Paul's waned when Pastor James Stuck was elected Bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the ELCA. Perhaps the fire begun in St. Paul's can somehow be rekindled.

But the fire of love still burned in Michigan City at Church of the Dunes in Pastor Harold and Kathy Oelschlager who took to heart Pastor Bvumbwe's invitation to come to talk to his pastors and evangelists and to teach his pre-school teachers in the ELCM. So, secretly they began to save funds. Funds did not accumulate until Pastor Oelschlager retired in 1993 and moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where he did numerous interim ministry pastorates. In 1996, they were ready. With the help of the Rev. Jack Reents, head of the volunteer department of Global Missions of the ELCA, they flew to Malawi at their own expense for a two-month stay and lived with the newly-elected Bishop in the new home provided for the Bishop by the ELCM. From June 29 to August 25, Harold and Kathy followed Bishop Bvumbwe throughout Malawi on his annual visit to the parishes (dioceses). Harold brought unofficial greetings from the five million members of the ELCA twenty-one times, even though ELCA had no official ties yet with the ELCM. The only contact with any ELCA member until now was via a volunteer couple working in the ELCM under auspices of Lutheran World Service based at Harare, Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, this couple gave a very negative report to Global Missions of the ELCA on the work in Malawi, which slowed relationships between the ELCA and the ELCM. But this has been overcome through the work and witness of Harold and Kathy. Besides visiting the parishes, Harold taught 47 pastors, evangelists, and parish workers a Bible course entitled "See Through The Scriptures" by the Rev. Harry Wendt of Crossways International, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Course materials were provided by Harold and left with ELCM and are still in use. Kathy taught thirteen pre-school teachers for a two-week seminar. One teacher still teaches in the parish at Blantyre and many of the others have gone on to teach outside the church.

First Official Visits

Upon return home, the Oelschlager's were in demand to share their experiences. Over the next four years they made 92 presentations to groups in congregations and in the community, also global mission Sundays, mostly within the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. But the most significant presentation they made was one made to the Northwest Synod Church Council in February 1997. The report was that Bishop Bvumbwe would be coming to America in May and probably would be available to speak at the Synod Assembly. The Holy Spirit stirred enthusiasm in the council and in the new Bishop, Robert Berg, for this new, struggling church in a very poor country. Invitations for guest speakers for the assembly were already decided, but surely an invitation could be made to Bishop Bvumbwe to bring greetings and

also that the Synod assembly offering could be designated to build one chapel in Malawi. As it turned out, Bishop Bvumbwe did not come until June, because of a Lutheran World Federation meeting he attended in Europe, but he did come to a celebration at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, where Bishop Berg presented a check for \$7100 from the Northwest Synod which included a thousand dollar gift from a couple outside the synod. With this gift two parish center chapels were built, one at Katewe and another at Kanchefu in Malawi, and were dedicated in 2000 when eight from NW Synod visited Malawi. A third chapel, a town parish center church, was also dedicated in 2000 at Zomba, a gift from Immanuel, Eau Claire, which had tithed a legacy. The decision to tithe is due in great part to the leadership of Pastor David K. Anderson, pastor of Immanuel, and the church council. Videos of these dedications are available at the Northwest Synod Resource Center.

A key factor in the companion synod relationship that has developed between the NW Synod of Wisconsin and the FLCM is the vision and support of Bishop Robert Berg together with the Synod Church Council which applied to the ELCA Department of Global Missions for a second companion synod in 1998. This set the wheels in motion because there still was no official relationship between the ELCA and the ELCM. Catching up must take place because the Northwest already had rather firm ties with the ELCM through special gifts and plans for a tour of the ELCM. Synod assemblies dating back to 1996 had displays of the relationship with the ELCM equal to or larger than the display of the companion relationship with Brazil. Negotiations with people of the ELCA Global Missions Department suggested that it would be to the advantage of the ELCM if the application for a second companion were accepted because it would receive church-wide support rather than just that of one synod. ELCA global missions representative, Benyam Kassahun, was sent to Malawi in November, 1999, to assess the situation and returned to the Northwest Synod to give a glowing report of the work there and conveyed the blessing of the ELCA for a second companion synod. The companion synod was now officially established.

Activities

With the tour of ELCM in 2000, the companion synod relationship spurted ahead. Now there was no longer one couple doing presentations, but four separate units. Diane Kaufmann, Pastor James and Sharon Magelssen, and Kathy Shattuck were now on the loose. Diane, on a trip to Zimbabwe to do a poultry project, also now did a private side excursion to the ELCM and Malawi. Later, she took with her Kathy Wohlers of Eau Claire who is now is part of the cadre of people doing presentations. More and more congregations now have Global Mission Sundays and observances because of these people who are available to give first-hand experiences. Added to this is the impact of Bishop Bvumbwe's coming for a two-year sabbatical in September 2000. While we lost pastor and Mrs. Magelssen to the Northern Iowa Synod, we gained Bishop Bvumbwe in person. Camp Wapogasset of Amery took him on their staff for one year to develop the "Malawi Village" where he produced "Zikomo", the experience of life in Malawi,

but Camp Wapo also released Bishop Bvumbwe to the congregations of Northwest Synod for pulpit supply and presentations by him and his wife, Maria. The results are phenomenal! To date there are twenty-four congregations of Northwest Synod who have applied for a sister congregation relationship with a congregation of the ELCM. It is hoped that all thirty parishes in the ELCM will have a sister congregation in the Northwest Synod.

Since 1996, books from retired pastors' libraries have flowed to ELCM's theological library, which has a pre-school subdivision. Gifts from congregations to the "Malawi Fund" of the synod were delivered by the tour group in 2000 to feed the many orphans. An additional \$15,000 from the 2000 synod assembly offering was sent through the ELCA Hunger Appeal for the congregation feeding stations run by the ELCM. Five congregations of Northwest Synod who have applied for sister congregation status have or are in the process of raising funds to build a chapel for their congregation in ELCM. The completion of these chapels will bring to 25% those congregations who have church buildings to worship in. Bicycles for evangelists and motorbikes for pastors have been given by the congregations. Most recently two mobile health clinics have been given, one by a congregation in Virginia who heard Bishop Bvumbwe speak at the Global Mission Event in Pennsylvania in 2001, the other by Immanuel, Eau Claire, again from a tithed legacy. Faith letter exchanges have begun in congregations with sister church pen pals in ELCM. Prayer for a sister congregation and for the ELCM is now a regular petition weekly in the prayers of the church in some congregations in the Northwest Synod.

Where are we'?

Bishop Bvumbwe is now at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, working on the degree of Doctor of Ministry. He will return to Malawi in July 2002. But, in the meantime he is still preaching in congregations whenever studies allow. But, an equally large contribution is his "twinning" of Northwest Synod congregations with congregations of the ELCM. It is this task that has led the Malawi sub-committee of the Northwest Synod's Global Missions Committee to set a workshop/seminar for pastors and representatives from congregations that are seeking the sister congregation relationship. It is a time where both Bishops will meet with pastors and representatives to outline and discuss what to do and what to do as a sister congregation.

So, from a small seed has grown a tree that is getting larger and larger. Only the Holy Spirit knows what seeds will yet fall from this tree to develop even more fully.

To God be all the glory for He works in unspeakable and unimaginable ways!

Similarities and Contrast within the Companion Synod Relationship

The Challenge (Comparing notes)

The ELCM position is that as long as Africa and its countries remain economically poor, the challenges will remain and will grow. Churches and governments must continue their efforts to make life bearable for the poor, but the answer is a collective one. The whole international community needs to join hands in the battle to fight poverty and systems of economic injustice that continue to make poor countries poorer and rich countries richer, and thereby also widening the growing gap between the rich and the poor. We need to work for justice dealings in international trade and fight corruption that robs people of their justly resources at all levels. The role of the church in its prophetic ministry needs to be revived and even emphasized, naming sin by its name, and pointing to the will of God for all his people in all countries of the world. The ELCM like other African churches will need to provide leadership in this effort as they themselves carry most of the burden and have to live with these burdens in their daily ministry. The word of God and his promises remain the source of hope for those who live in poverty and injustice. The church must remain strong in its ministry based on the knowledge that God has promised to be always present with it up to the end. We should not allow sin and persistent sufferings of human life to become the stumbling block to fine gospel message of our Lord Jesus. We have the opportunity to join hands and give hope to the world.

As you will have noted from above, the African continent is a suffering continent. It is there that the Lutheran Church in Malawi is witnessing and growing. As already pointed out, the context has a lot to do with how the church perceives itself and its mission. Here unlike elsewhere the church is preoccupied with giving hope to the hopeless and giving life to the dying. Spiritually the people are very much alive, but physically they are dying and don't understand the reasons behind continued suffering. The pastors, of which the bishop is one among others, are constantly engaged in theological reflection and lead the people on a theological journey to find meaning to life in the midst of suffering, to find life in the midst of death, to find light in the midst of darkness. This is done together in small group Bible studies. Each person is taken seriously and so are their contributions to the life and ministry of ELCM.

Pastoral Visits

Bishops are regularly required to visit pastors in order to provide encouragement. Most of the pastors find themselves serving in very difficult situations, far from everybody else. Here the bishop will visit and offer encouragement. This is important for the pastor who must in turn offer encouragement to his parishioners. The bishop's visitation program is a time of revival and renewal. It is also a time of witnessing to a wider community through evangelism. During these visits hope is offered through life giving sermons that the bishop must deliver to his flock. These sermons are expected to be spiritually powerful and life giving.

For example it is common knowledge that when I am visiting the parishes during the bishop's yearly visit, the services will be long, normally between three to four hours long. This is not so because people

have nothing to do, or time to waste, it is so far a number of reasons. They tell me that:

- a. It is good to be in the house of God and they are pleased when someone tells them “Let’s go to the house of the Lord”. They wait for these days to come. They want to hear what God wants to say through his messenger. “It is good for us to be here”, is a commonly shared experience during these visits.
- b. Their presence at the church with the bishop unites them with many other fellow members of the church. It is time of Bible studies and Theological reflection on what is happening in general.
- c. The message being shared has been shared with others like them in the church elsewhere. Through it they find hope and a purpose for living. Here serious challenges e.g. HIV/AIDS is openly discussed helping with advice.
- d. In addition to celebrating sacraments they may witness dedication of their new church or ordination of their new pastor, and many more. Above all, it is time for groups e.g. youth and women to meet the Bishop and discuss matters that affect them in the church.

You can therefore see that the visits are part of the church’s journey and celebrated with a lot of anticipation. They form one of the church’s major activities. The Bishop’s visits bring them the wider fellowship of the church. Even Christians of other denominations join in with them during such visits. Our work in ecumenism is strengthened, witnessing together as Christians. We speak more of what unites us than what separates us. Our congregations learn to work and cooperate with other denominations because the people they or serve come from the same families. Pastors will usually cover a number of Congregations that are lead by our lay leaders. These lay headers who are both male and female expects regular pastoral visits from their pastor.

Pastoral visits aims at giving hope. This is one of the fundamental roles of the church in society. We see this throughout history and it ought to be so even today as we face our contemporary challenges. There are so many difficulties that we easily become overwhelmed and heartbroken. Our nations are very unstable. We fear our political people are easily intimidated. So just like the rats we ask each other “who will hang the bell on the neck of the cat”. No one is courageous enough to carry out such risky task fearing that they may not come back alive. Our Politicians have been known for their readiness to kill those who may oppose them. Speaking of HIV/AIDS, we don’t know what to say or what to do. The pandemic is like nothing we have seen before. It is a real killer. It kills mostly our adults, while Malaria continues to kill children especially children under five years of age. This challenges us and reminds us to implement all our work as holistically as possible, thereby not bypassing the challenges we face on daily basis.

Poverty and Diseases

Over the years, I have tried hard to study the close link between poverty and disease. My suspicion was confirmed through one of my research projects during the current study program. I was not surprised to discover the two sides of injustice, namely poverty and disease. The study showed that there is a very close association or link between poverty and diseases including HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS has been acknowledged as the greatest health threat facing the world today especially the Sub-Saharan Africa, with the rate of infection reported to be the highest. Its impact has left no person unfelt. Individual, families and communities have all been impacted one way or the other. The number of orphans related to HIV/AIDS deaths is currently estimated to be over 12.1 million in Africa. Africa is said to have over 75% of the world HIV/AIDS cases. As already pointed out, the number is still on the rise. My project attempts proposals on how the churches can move to suggest how we can begin to reverse the trend. A number of ways have been suggested for the church involvement as well as the role of families and society. As pointed out, I share the view that the family would be a good starting point in order to succeed, then move to the small village groups. This is where power is and it is right in the small group where success can be achieved. We will have to work hard to equip the small groups within our youth and women's work. Looking at Western Europe and North America, the project also takes seriously the use of all the resources including monetary resources that must be put to use in order to fight poverty, which has made Africa to become a bleeding ground for HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases. Here again the role of partnership cannot be over emphasized. This together with all other disciplines, faith, prayer and service to one another would make a positive impact. I am more than convinced that we will have to use all resources at our disposal to deal with HIV/AIDS. We must leave no stone unturned. "Even the pulpit must be used" to alert the people of the dangers of this killer disease. The people have waited too long for the church to speak out on this issue and it is time that the church do so.

Malawi Village Experience- Getting to know one another.

Of all the activities conducted during the formation of our companionship perhaps the "Malawi Village" was the most far-reaching experience. It was planned in such a way that the participants felt as if they had actually visited Malawi. They tested different types of Malawi foods and witnessed the Malawi traditional dances. In the evening they listened to Malawian stories, traditional dances and participated in Malawi soccer for males and netball for females. Altogether it was a wonderful experience and had far-reaching benefits for our newly formed companionship. It was so good that Bishop Berg and many other synod staff participated in the Malawi Village experience.

The Malawi Village experience documentation has been appended to this report for easy reference. Here I want to be grateful to Wapo Bible Camp for hosting the experience for us.

Twinning workshop for the Companion Synod, Chetek Lutheran Church- Chetek, Wisconsin. Feb 16, 2002.

A. History of our companionship- our walking together by retired Pastor Harold Oelschlager. He gave the following narrative.

History of Companion

Condensed History of the Companion Synod Relationship between Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi.

The relationship began in 1991 when the then Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM), Joseph P. Bvumbwe, came to America to study for a master's degree in theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. He completed the degree in 1992 and returned to Malawi with his family.

While in America, Pastor Bvumbwe came in contact with congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Colorado, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Contact with churches in Michigan City, Indiana proved to be significant because Pastor Bvumbwe met Kathy and Harold Oelschlager, who visited the ELCM in 1996. Pastor Bvumbwe had been elected Bishop of the ELCM in 1995. The Oelschlager's upon returning to the US reported their observations of the ELCM to Rev. Robert Berg, the new Bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and to the synod church council.

Bishop Berg and the church council decided to invite Bishop Bvumbwe to speak at the 1997 synod assembly and to devote the assembly offering for construction of a chapel somewhere in the ELCM. In 1998, Bishop Berg and the synod church council applied to the ELCA Division of Global Missions for a second companion synod, namely, the ELCM. In 1999, after sending Rev. Benyam Kassahun, ELCA director of Eastern Africa Companion Synod Relationships, to assess the ELCM, the application was granted.

The companion relationship was furthered in 2000 when the Rev James Magelssen, Assistant Bishop from Northwest Synod, headed a delegation of eight to the ELCM. Three chapels built by Northwest Synod were dedicated during the trip, two of them due to the 1997 synod assembly offering, the third by a congregation of the synod.

Also of great significance is the role played by Wapogasset Bible Camp, Amery, Wisconsin. In 2001, Bishop Bvumbwe was invited to spend the first year of his sabbatical in America to be part of the

Wapogasset Bible Camp staff to develop a Malawi Village Experience. At the same time, the bible camp released Bishop Bvumbwe to preach in the congregations of the synod, with the result that 23 congregations applied to be part of a companion congregation/parish relationship with the ELCM.

On February 16, 2002, Bishop Berg and Bishop Bvumbwe led a workshop/seminar to guide congregations in the companion relationship process.

Research findings part II.

Discussions and findings with one of the site advisors, Rev. Harold Oelschlager at his home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Rooting the Companion Relation

The first workshop in developing parish/congregational sister relationship
Sat Feb 16, Chetek Lutheran - Chetek, Wisconsin.

1. Opening remarks and prayer by bishop Berg
2. Condensed history by Pastor Harold Oelschlager
3. Key note speech by Bishop Bvumbwe
4. Guiding principles by Pastor Gary Hedding on behalf of ELCA/DGM
5. Group discussions led by Diane Kaufmann
6. Anticipation's of a sister congregational relationship
7. The twinning process
8. The available resources.

Condensed findings of a research carried with pastors and representatives of the congregations at Chetek Lutheran, Feb 16, 2002. On anticipation's of a Sister Congregation Relationship and plain results from Group discussions.

1. What do you hope to gain from a relationship with a congregation/parish in Malawi?
 - a. expand our mission beyond our community
 - b. better understanding of Christianity in other parts of the world
 - c. gaining knowledge of witnessing
 - d. sense of belonging to a world-wide Christian movement
 - e. sense of relevance of movement of Christian church in world,
 - f. renewal of our own identity
 - g. sense of mission to specific place gives realistic view
 - h. better understanding of different cultures and our own faith
 - i. gain excitement for mission and witnessing

- j. expand and deepen the range of our prayer life
2. What are your hopes and dreams about such a relationship?
 - a. putting names and places on a church in another part of the world
 - b. expose everyone in our congregations to hopes and dreams of committee enthusiasm
 - c. sense of personal relationship with Malawi Christians
 - d. learn how to care for Malawi Christians and their life and future
 - e. mutual strengthening of faith by encouraging us and them
 3. How do these hopes and dreams relate to your faith? The faith of your congregation?
 - a. by relating to struggles in Malawi it will help us to learn to grow in our faith
 - b. being renewed and being refreshed
 - c. getting more deeply in touch with our own neediness and that we have a lot to receive
 - d. discover our own generosity and be excited by it
 - e. see the results of our faith
 - f. congregations growing in maturity of their faith
 - g. learning how to receive gifts given in faith
 - h. being inspired by faithfulness of our companions in Malawi
 4. What joys are you anticipating?
 - a. joys of seeing a relationship grow
 - b. joy of giving and receiving
 - c. anticipate joys of new travel opportunities
 - d. new expressions of faith and worship
 - e. joy of realizing how wide God's family is
 - f. sense of accomplishment that you have helped/walked with someone
 - g. walking with another culture
 - h. gaining the joy of worship
 - i. joy of obedience, seeing ourselves obedient to the Great Commission
 - j. joy of new-found friends
 - k. joy of experiencing ourselves as belonging and being part of something larger than ourselves- wholeness and healing
 - l. joy of visiting
 - m. enriching our lives and theirs
 5. What fears do you have?
 - a. sheer number of people
 - b. getting beyond materialistic issues
 - c. being careful not to destroy progress already made-unintentional "good" deeds
 - d. apathy of our own response-not seeing the big vision

- e. fear of failure, not doing it right
 - f. interest might die in our congregation
 - g. develop a dependency relationship
 - h. by putting resources here we might take away resources needed elsewhere
 - i. lack of patience in allowing relationships to form
 - j. fear of hurting people of a culture we're not as familiar with
 - k. fear of unknown
6. What will enable you to more fully enjoy and develop this relationship?
- a. good communication
 - b. learning about cultural differences
 - c. support network within conference
 - d. get more congregational members involved-specific ties between groups-Sunday School to Sunday School, Women's Groups, Choirs, etc.
 - e. cultural exchange
7. Are you and your congregation prepared for this journey? How will you help others in your congregation prepare?
- a. communication and information, getting the word out
 - b. using existing committees or forming a new task force
 - c. use specific projects readily attainable, gain success, move to bigger projects, networking with other congregations for big projects
 - d. no-yes!
 - e. adventure that will unfold
 - f. pray that members of congregation will be open to developing relationship
 - g. increase our member's identity so a give and take relationship can grow
8. What practical things do you anticipate doing to establish and carry on a meaningful sister relationship?
- a. lifting up our partners in intercessory prayer
 - b. using music/hymns from Malawi
 - c. using newsletters to keep people informed, sharing correspondence
 - d. exchanging congregational pictures
 - e. exchanging faith letters-growing relationships
 - f. network between companion congregations for ideas
 - g. pictures and letters by all ages
 - h. working together with companion parish in mutual mission project
 - i. sharing stories of our congregation and our lives
 - j. sharing stories in worship and prayers

9. What resources will help you?
 - a. living letters-witness from folks who have already been to Malawi
 - b. speakers/resources- “outside expert” from outside the congregation
 - c. music resources for worship

Presentation by Rev. Gary Hedding, Assistant to the Bishop, on behalf of the ELCA’s companion desk, Division for Global Ministries
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Proclaim - A Gospel oriented enterprise

Serve -In solidarity with, sharing with and advocating on behalf of others

Accompany - Expressing unity & helping develop leadership

Receive -Mutuality in relationships and openness to sharing our needs.

Walking Together in the Manner of Christ

Life-giving - Upbuilding for both, enriching for both

Shaped by the Cross - Our approach is empty and humble, seeking the broken and oppressed, confessing our own brokenness and oppressions

Witnessing in Relationships -CONVERSATION, growing appreciation

Embracing the Gifts of All - Prejudice limits God’s mission; looking for gifts that are not like our own

Participating in “Common Basket” - Supporting work of the ELCM by responding to needs list

What Are Other Synods Doing?

Prayer - Remembering and lifting one another up

Worship - trying each other’s worship practices

Communication - letters from many sources

Learning - about one another and from one another

Advocacy - On behalf of one another’s needs

Travel/Exchanges - Meeting each other face-to-face

Support for Ministry - Gifts given through the synod office and ELCM to benefit parishes as needed.

The following became clear: The companion synod relationship between Northwest Synod relationship between Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi was formalized and is now being rooted in the work and ministries of congregations and parishes.

That while all congregations of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin are part of the companion synod relationship, some have chosen to develop a stronger companionship and friendship through communication and support.

Congregations in this program are required to attend a training session, learning about cultural differences, about suggestions for communication.

Those congregations that are twinned to the parishes in ELCM are encouraged to visit and host guests from their sister parishes in Malawi. Visits would commence sometime in the coming year of 2003.

These congregations were presented with certificates symbolizing their commitment to the companionship as was agreed.

Conclusion

The need for partnership between African countries and world's richest countries cannot be overemphasized. So is the need for a similar cooperation between churches in Africa and churches in the rich countries. However, as the research has shown, ours is rather a relationship of interdependency. We need one another on our journeys so that we can walk together as we journey with Christ on the road to Emmaus. Our partnership shall help us to renew each other in our faith journey. As African churches face their challenges, they can count on their partners in the rich nations to be there for them. The same can be true for the North American churches. African churches are ready to stand with them as they face the forces of secularization today. We need each other, and our survival very much depends on how we relate to one another. We are members of the same body; therefore we have learnt that our partnership is a matter of life and death for the people. We must follow the example of our Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospel according to John Chapter: 9. In the gospel, Jesus demonstrates for us that

1. He was compassionate; he saw the challenge before him and did not miss the opportunity to do something to help the person indeed - the blind man.
2. He did not have time asking the wrong questions that the disciples were asking, but challenged

them to reveal the glory of God in the person. H makes no apology to his actions.

3. He even had to work making clay so that the person could see, reminding us to work for healing.
4. He made it clear that He was the light of the world and would work as long as it was day, for night was coming when no one would work. He did all this for the one who sent him, not for himself. John 9:1 Here we learn that we do not have all the time. We need to work hard and work now before night comes when no one can work anymore. Each of these points has a lot to teach us about our service to one another as partners in our mission to Christ. Most of all, we can learn the need to work hard to help those in need and to do so without wasting much time thereby losing life that could have otherwise been saved. Our partnership is about walking together in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, for there is nothing that we can do that he never did for us, and no place that we can go where he has never been. "For no one can lay another foundation either than the one which is already laid for us Jesus Christ our Lord". It is his word that directed Peter in John 21 that if he confesses that he loves Jesus, then he should take care of his sheep. "Do you really love me more than these others? Then feed my sheep and take care of my lamb". In other words, if we say that we love Jesus, we shall serve God's people wherever they may be.

Currently more than 5,000 lives are lost to AIDS in Africa every day. The USA makes up just 5% of the world population but live on more than one third of the world's wealth. Still more as you can see on the attached aids sheet, the U.S. foreign aid to the developing countries is still less than one tenth of a percent of its gross domestic product. Most European nations spend three times that percentage on foreign aid but still remains below one percent of their domestic product. It is my view that the churches be challenged to do more and lead the international community in the battle against poverty in the world in general and in Africa in particular. "I have heard the cry of my people and I have come down to save them", says the Lord The church is the Lord's presence on earth.

It is the light shining out of darkness. It is the hope of the world. This must be compelling enough for our partnership together in mission.

Useful materials developed

1. Parish/congregational brochures on sister companionship
2. Certificates of companionship
3. ELCM parish addresses
4. Possible areas of cooperation- a mobile clinic for orphans.
5. Project on prevention, feeding and care for HIV/AIDS orphans in Malawi
6. Various other documents which are attached as appendixes to this project report.

Bibliography

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The ELCA Constitution

The ELCM Constitution- 3rd Revised Edition, 1994

The History of the ELCM- 1st Edition, Dee, 2000

DGM Country packets

The Companion Synods program (Walking together in the next Century).

Stand with Africa- a campaign of hope- ELCA/DGM

Various companion/partnership agreements and letters of understanding were also consulted during the study.

The Bible. New Revised Standard Version

The constitution of the ELCM and the ELCA-NW Synod

Abbreviations

NWS - Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

ELCA - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

DGM - Division for Global mission

ELCM - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi.

LWF- Lutheran World Federation